# VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS

ARNOLD BINDLOSS

# VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS

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# VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS

BY

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"WINSTON OF THE PRAIRIE," "LORIMER OF THE NORTHWEST,"
"THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY," "SYDNEY
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# VANE OF THE TIMBERLANDS

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## CHAPTER I

### A FRIEND IN NEED

A LIGHT breeze, scented with the smell of the firs, was blowing down the inlet, and the tiny ripples it chased across the water splashed musically against the bows of the canoe. They met her end-on, sparkling in the warm sunset light, gurgled about her sides, and trailed away astern in two divergent lines as the paddles flashed and fell. There was a thud as the blades struck the water, and the long, light hull forged onward with slightly lifted, bird's-head prow, while the two men swung forward for the next stroke with a rhythmic grace of motion. They knelt, facing forward, in the bottom of the craft, and, dissimilar as they were in features and, to some extent, in character, the likeness between them was stronger than the difference. Both bore the unmistakable stamp of a wholesome life spent in vigorous labor in the open. Their eyes were clear and, like those of most bushmen, singularly steady; their skin was clean and weather-darkened; and they were leanly muscular.

On either side of the lane of green water giant firs, cedars and balsams crept down the rocky hills to the whitened driftwood fringe. They formed part of the

great coniferous forest which rolls west from the wet Coast Range of Canada's Pacific Province and, overleaping the straits, spreads across the rugged and beautiful wilderness of Vancouver Island. Ahead, clusters of little frame houses showed up here and there in openings among the trees, and a small sloop, toward which the canoe was heading, lay anchored near the wharf.

The men had plied the paddle during most of that day, from inclination rather than necessity, for they could have hired Siwash Indians to undertake the labor for them, had they been so minded. They were, though their appearance did not suggest it, moderately prosperous; but their prosperity was of recent date; they had been accustomed to doing everything for themselves, as are most of the men who dwell among the woods and ranges of British Columbia.

Vane, who knelt nearest the bow, was twenty-seven years of age. Nine of those years he had spent chopping trees, driving cattle, poling canoes and assisting in the search for useful minerals among the snow-clad ranges. He wore a wide, gray felt hat, which had lost its shape from frequent wettings, an old shirt of the same color, and blue duck trousers, rent in places; but the light attire revealed a fine muscular symmetry. He had brown hair and brown eyes; and a certain warmth of coloring which showed through the deep bronze of his skin hinted at a sanguine and somewhat impatient temperament. As a matter of fact, the man was resolute and usually shrewd; but there was a vein of impulsiveness in him, and, while he possessed considerable powers of endurance, he was on occasion troubled by a shortness of temper.

His companion, Carroll, had lighter hair and gray eyes, and his appearance was a little less vigorous and a little more refined; though he, too, had toiled hard and borne many privations in the wilderness. His dress resembled Vane's, but, dilapidated as it was, it suggested a greater fastidiousness.

The two had located a valuable mineral property some months earlier and, though this does not invariably follow, had held their own against city financiers during the negotiations that preceded the floating of a company to work the mine. That they had succeeded in securing a good deal of the stock was largely due to Vane's pertinacity and said something for his acumen; but both had been trained in a very hard school.

As the wooden houses ahead rose higher and the sloop's gray hull grew into sharper shape upon the clear green shining of the brine, Vane broke into a snatch of song:

> "Had I the wings of a dove, I would fly
> Just for to-night to the Old Country."

He stopped and laughed.

"It's nine years since I've seen it, but I can't get those lines out of my head. Perhaps it's because of the girl who sang them. Somehow, I felt sorry for her. She had remarkably fine eyes."

"Sea-blue," suggested his companion. "I don't grasp the connection between the last two remarks."

"Neither do I," admitted Vane. "I suppose there isn't one. But they weren't sea-blue; unless you mean the depth of indigo when you are out of soundings. They're Irish eyes."

"You're not Irish. There's not a trace of the Celt

in you, except, perhaps, your habit of getting indignant with the people who don't share your views."

"No, sir! By birth, I'm North Country — England, I mean. Over there we're descendants of the Saxons, Scandinavians, Danes — Teutonic stock at bottom, anyhow; and we've inherited their unromantic virtues. We're solid, and cautious, respectable before everything, and smart at getting hold of anything worth having. As a matter of fact, you Ontario Scotsmen are mighty like us."

"You certainly came out well ahead of those city men who put up the money," agreed Carroll. "I guess it's in the blood; though I fancied once or twice that they would take the mine from you."

Vane brought his paddle down with a thud.

"Just for to-night to the Old Country,—"

he hummed, and added:

"It sticks to one."

"What made you leave the Old Country? I don't think you ever told me."

Vane laughed.

"That's a blamed injudicious question to ask anybody, as you ought to know; but in this particular instance you shall have an answer. There was a row at home — I was a sentimentalist then, and just eighteen — and as a result of it I came out to Canada." His voice changed and grew softer. "I hadn't many relatives, and, except one sister, they're all gone now. That reminds me — she's not going to lecture for the county education authorities any longer."

The sloop was close ahead, and slackening the pad-

dling they ran alongside. Vane glanced at his watch when they had climbed on board.

"Supper will be finished at the hotel," he remarked. "You had better get the stove lighted. It's your turn, and that rascally Siwash seems to have gone off again. It he's not back when we're ready, we'll sail without him."

Supper is served at the hotels in the western settlements as soon as work ceases for the day, and the man who arrives after it is over must wait until the next day's breakfast is ready. Carroll, accordingly, prepared the meal; and when they had finished it they lay on deck smoking with a content not altogether accounted for by a satisfied appetite. They had spent several anxious months, during which they had come very near the end of their slender resources, arranging for the exploitation of the mine, and now at last the work was over. Vane had that day made his final plans for the construction of a road and a wharf by which the ore could be economically shipped for reduction, or, as an alternative to this, for the erection of a small smelting plant. They had bought the sloop as a convenient means of conveyance and shelter, as they could live in some comfort on board; and now they could take their ease for a while, which was a very unusual thing to both of them.

"I suppose you're bent on sailing this craft back?" Carroll remarked at length. "We could hire a couple of Siwash to take her home while we rode across the island and got the train to Victoria. Besides, there's that steamboat coming down the coast to-night."

"Either way would cost a good deal extra."

"That's true," Carroll agreed with an amused expression; "but you could charge it to the company."

Vane laughed.

"You and I have a big stake in the concern; and I haven't got used to spending money unnecessarily yet. I've been mighty glad to earn a couple dollars by working from sunup until dark, though I didn't always get it afterward. So have you."

"How are you going to dispose of your money, then? You have a nice little balance in cash, besides the shares."

"It has occurred to me that I might spend a few months in the Old Country. Have you ever been over there?"

"I was across some time ago; but, if you like, I'll go along with you. We could start as soon as we've arranged the few matters left open in Vancouver."

Vane was glad to hear it. He knew little about Carroll's antecedents, but his companion was obviously a man of education, and they had been staunch comrades for the last three years. They had plodded through leagues of rain-swept bush, had forded icy rivers, had slept in wet fern and sometimes slushy snow, and had toiled together with pick and drill. During that time they had learned to know and trust each other and to bear with each other's idiosyncrasies.

Filling his pipe again as he lay in the fading sunlight, Vane looked back on the nine years he had passed in Canada, and, allowing for the periods of exposure to cold and wet and the almost ceaseless toil, he admitted that he might have spent them more unpleasantly. He had a stout heart and a muscular body, and the physical hardships had not troubled him.

What was more, he had a quick, almost instinctive, judgment and the faculty for seizing an opportunity.

Having quarreled with his relatives and declined any favors from them, he had come to Canada with only a few pounds and had promptly set about earning a living with his hands. When he had been in the country several years, a friend of the family had, however, sent him a small sum, and the young man had made judicious use of the money. The lot he bought outside a wooden town doubled in value, and the share he took in a new orchard paid him well; but he had held aloof from the cities, and his only recklessness had been his prospecting journeys into the wilderness. Prospecting for minerals is at once an art and a gamble. Skill, acquired by long experience or instinctive — and there are men who seem to possess the latter — counts for much, but chance plays a leading part. Provisions, tents and packhorses are expensive, and though a placer mine may be worked by two partners, a reef or lode can be disposed of only to men with means sufficient to develop it. Even in this delicate matter, in which he had had keen wits against him, Vane had held his own; but there was one side of life with which he was practically unacquainted.

There are no social amenities on the rangeside or in the bush, where women are scarce. Vane had lived in Spartan simplicity, practising the ascetic virtues, as a matter of course. He had had no time for sentiment, his passions had remained unstirred; and now he was seven and twenty, sound and vigorous of body, and, as a rule, level of head. At length, however, there was to be a change. He had earned an inter-

lude of leisure, and he meant to enjoy it without, so he prudently determined, making a fool of himself.

Presently Carroll took his pipe from his mouth.

"Are you going ashore again to the show to-night?"

"Yes," Vane answered. "It's a long while since I've struck an entertainment of any kind, and that yellow-haired mite's dancing is one of the prettiest things I've seen."

"You've been twice already," Carroll hinted. "The girl with the blue eyes sings her first song rather well."

"I think so," Vane agreed with a significant absence of embarrassment. "In this case a good deal depends on the singing — the interpretation, isn't it? The thing's on the border, and I've struck places where they'd have made it gross; but the girl only brought out the mischief. Strikes me she didn't see there was anything else in it."

"That's curious, considering the crowd she goes about with. Aren't you cultivating a critical faculty?"

Vane disregarded the ironical question.

"She's Irish; that accounts for a good deal."

He paused and looked thoughtful.

"If I knew how to do it, I'd like to give five or ten dollars to the child who dances. It must be a tough life, and her mother — the woman at the piano — looks ill. I wonder whatever brought them to a place like this?"

"Struck a cold streak at Nanaimo, the storekeeper told me. Anyway, since we're to start at sunup, I'm staying here." Then he smiled. "Has it struck you

that your attendance in the front seats is liable to misconception?"

Vane rose without answering and dropped into the canoe. Thrusting her off, he drove the light craft toward the wharf with vigorous strokes of the paddle, and Carroll shook his head whimsically as he watched him.

"Anybody except myself would conclude that he's waking up at last," he commented.

A minute or two later Vane swung himself up onto the wharf and strode into the wooden settlement. There were one or two hydraulic mines and a pulp mill in the vicinity, and, though the place was by no means populous, a company of third-rate entertainers had arrived there a few days earlier. On reaching the rude wooden building in which they had given their performance and finding it closed, he accosted a lounger.

"What's become of the show?" he asked.

"Busted. Didn't take the boys' fancy. The crowd went out with the stage this afternoon; though I heard that two of the women stayed behind. Somebody said the hotel-keeper had trouble about his bill."

Vane turned away with a slight sense of compassion. More than once during his first year or two in Canada he had limped footsore and weary into a wooden town where nobody seemed willing to employ him. An experience of the kind was unpleasant to a vigorous man, but he reflected that it must be much more so in the case of a woman, who probably had nothing to fall back upon. However, he dismissed the matter from his mind. Having been kneeling in a cramped position in the canoe most of the day, he decided to

stroll along the waterside before going back to the sloop.

Great firs stretched out their somber branches over the smooth shingle, and now that the sun had gone their clean resinous smell was heavy in the dew-cooled air. Here and there brushwood grew among outcropping rock and moss-grown logs lay fallen among the brambles.

Catching sight of what looked like a strip of woven fabric beneath a brake, Vane strode toward it. Then he stopped with a start, for a young girl lay with her face hidden from him, in an attitude of dejected abandonment. He was about to turn away softly, when she started and looked up at him. Her long dark lashes glistened and her eyes were wet, but they were of the deep blue he had described to Carroll, and he stood still.

"You really shouldn't give way like that," he said.

It was all he could think of, but he spoke without obtrusive assurance or pronounced embarrassment; and the girl, shaking out her crumpled skirt over one little foot, with a swift sinuous movement, choked back a sob and favored him with a glance of keen scrutiny as she rose to a sitting posture. She was quick at reading character — the life she led had made that necessary — and his manner and appearance were reassuring. He was on the whole a well-favored man — good-looking seemed the best word for it — though what impressed her most was his expression. It indicated that he regarded her with some pity, not as an attractive young woman, which she knew she was, but merely as a human being. The girl, however, said nothing; and, sit-

ting down on a neighboring boulder, Vane took out his pipe from force of habit.

"Well," he added, in much the same tone he would have used to a distressed child, "what's the trouble?"

She told him, speaking on impulse.

"They've gone off and left me! The takings didn't meet expenses; there was no treasury."

"That's bad," responded Vane gravely. "Do you mean they've left you alone?"

"No; it's worse than that. I suppose I could go — somewhere — but there's Mrs. Marvin and Elsie."

"The child who dances?"

The girl assented, and Vane looked thoughtful. He had already noticed that Mrs. Marvin, whom he supposed to be the child's mother, was worn and frail, and he did not think there was anything she could turn her hand to in a vigorous mining community. The same applied to his companion, though he was not greatly astonished that she had taken him into her confidence. The reserve that characterizes the insular English is less common in the West, where the stranger is more readily taken on trust.

"The three of you stick together?" he suggested.

"Of course! Mrs. Marvin's the only friend I have."

"Then I suppose you've no idea what to do?"

"No," she confessed, and then explained, not very clearly, that it was the cause of her distress and that they had had bad luck of late. Vane could understand that as he looked at her. Her dress was shabby, and he fancied that she had not been bountifully fed.

"If you stayed here a few days you could go out

with the next stage and take the train to Victoria." He paused and continued diffidently: "It could be arranged with the hotel-keeper."

She laughed in a half-hysterical manner, and he remembered what she had said about the treasury, and that fares are high in that country.

"I suppose you have no money," he added with blunt directness. "I want you to tell Mrs. Marvin that I'll lend her enough to take you all to Victoria."

Her face crimsoned. He had not quite expected that, and he suddenly felt embarrassed. It was a relief when she broke the brief silence.

"No," she replied; "I can't do that. For one thing, it would be too late when we got to Victoria. I think we could get an engagement if we reached Vancouver in time to get to Kamloops by —"

Vane knit his brows when he heard the date, and it was a moment or two before he spoke.

"There's only one way you can do it. There's a little steamboat coming down the coast to-night. I had half thought of intercepting her, anyway, and handing the skipper some letters to post in Victoria. He knows me — I'm likely to have dealings with his employers. That's my sloop yonder, and if I put you on board the steamer, you'd reach Vancouver in good time. We should have sailed at sunup, anyhow."

The girl hesitated and turned partly from him. He surmised that she did not know what to make of his offer, though her need was urgent. In the meanwhile he stood up.

"Come along and talk it over with Mrs. Marvin," he urged. "I'd better tell you that I'm Wallace

Vane, of the Clermont Mine. Of course, I know your name, from the program."

She rose and they walked back to the hotel. Once more it struck him that the girl was pretty and graceful, though he had already deduced from several things that she had not been regularly trained as a singer nor well educated. On reaching the hotel, he sat down on the veranda while she went in, and a few minutes later Mrs. Marvin came out and looked at him much as the girl had done. He grew hot under her gaze and repeated his offer in the curtest terms.

"If this breeze holds, we'll put you on board the steamer soon after daybreak," he explained.

The woman's face softened, and he recognized now that there had been strong suspicion in it.

"Thank you," she said simply; "we'll come."

There was a moment's silence and then she added with an eloquent gesture:

"You don't know what it means to us!"

Vane merely took off his hat and turned away; but a minute or two later he met the hotel-keeper.

"Do these people owe you anything?" he asked.

"Five dollars; they paid up part of the time. I was wondering what to do with them. Guess they've no money. They didn't come in to supper, though we would have stood them that. Made me think they were straight folks; the other kind wouldn't have been bashful."

Vane handed him a bill.

"Take it out of this, and make any excuse you like. I'm going to put them on board the steamboat."

The man made no comment, and Vane, striding down to the beach, sent a hail ringing across the

water. Carroll appeared on the sloop's deck and answered him.

"Hallo!" he cried. "What's the trouble?"

"Get ready the best supper you can manage, for three people, as quick as you can!"

"Supper for three people!"

Vane caught the astonished exclamation and came near losing his temper.

"For three people!" he shouted. "Don't ask any fool questions! You'll see later on!"

Then he turned away in a hurry, wondering somewhat uneasily what Carroll would say when he grasped the situation.

## CHAPTER II

### A BREEZE OF WIND

THERE were signs of a change in the weather when Vane walked down to the wharf with his passengers, for a cold wind which had sprung up struck an eery sighing from the somber firs and sent the white mists streaming along the hillside. There was a watery moon in the sky, and when they reached the water's edge Vane fancied that the singer hesitated; but Mrs. Marvin laid her hand on the girl's arm reassuringly, and she got into the canoe. A few minutes later Vane ran the craft alongside the sloop and saw the amazement in Carroll's face by the glow from the cabin skylight. He fancied, however, that his comrade would rise to the occasion, and he helped his guests up.

"My partner, Carroll. Mrs. Marvin and her daughter; Miss Kitty Blake. You have seen them already. They're coming down with us to catch the steamer."

Carroll bowed, and Vane thrust back the cabin slide and motioned the others below. The place was brightly lighted by a nickeled lamp, though it was scarcely four feet high and the centerboard trunk occupied the middle of it. A wide cushioned locker ran along either side a foot above the floor, and a swing-table, fixed above the trunk, filled up most of the

space between. There was no cloth on the table, but it was invitingly laid out with canned fruit, coffee, hot flapjacks and a big lake trout, for in the western bush most men can cook.

"You must help yourselves while we get sail upon the boat," said Vane cheerily. "The saloon's at your disposal — my partner and I have the forecastle. You will notice that there are blankets yonder, and as we'll have smooth water most of the way you should get some sleep. Perhaps you'd better keep the stove burning; and if you should like some coffee in the early morning you'll find it in the top locker."

He withdrew, closing the slide, and went forward with Carroll to shorten in the cable; but when they stopped beside the bitts his companion broke into a laugh.

"Is there anything amusing you?" Vane asked curtly.

"Well," drawled Carroll, "this country, of course, isn't England; but, for all that, it's desirable that a man who expects to make his mark in it should exercise a certain amount of caution. It strikes me that you're making a rather unconventional use of your new prosperity, and it might be prudent to consider how some of your friends in Vancouver may regard the adventure."

Vane sat down upon the bitts and took out his pipe.

"One trouble in talking to you is that I never know whether you're in earnest or not. You trot out your cold-blooded worldly wisdom — I suppose it is wisdom — and then you grin at it."

"It seems to me that's the only philosophic attitude," Carroll replied. "It's possible to grow furi-

ously indignant with the restraints stereotyped people lay on one, but on the whole it's wiser to bow to them and chuckle. After all, they've some foundation."

Vane looked up at him sharply.

"You've been right in the advice you have given me more than once. You seem to know how prosperous, and what you call stereotyped, people look at things. But you've never explained where you acquired the knowledge."

"Oh, that's quite another matter," laughed Carroll.

"Anyway, there's one remark of yours I'd like to answer. You would, no doubt, consider that I made a legitimate use of my money when I entertained that crowd of city people — some of whom would have plundered me if they could have managed it — in Vancouver. I didn't grudge it, of course, but I was a little astonished when I saw the wine and cigar bill. It struck me that the best of them scarcely noticed what they got — I think they'd been up against it at one time, as we have; and it would have done the rest of the guzzlers good if they'd had to work with the shovel all day on pork and flapjacks. But we'll let that go. What have you and I done that we should swill in champagne, while a girl with a face like that one below and a child who dances like a fairy haven't enough to eat? You know what I paid for the last cigars. What confounded hogs we are!"

Carroll laughed outright. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his comrade, who was hardened and toughened by determined labor. With rare exceptions, which included the occa-

sions when he had entertained or had been entertained in Vancouver, his greatest indulgence had been a draught of strong green tea from a blackened pannikin, though he had at times drunk nothing but river water. The term hog appeared singularly inappropriate as applied to him.

"Well," replied Carroll, "you'll no doubt get used to the new conditions by and by; and in regard to your latest exploit, there's a motto on your insignia of the Garter which might meet the case. But hadn't we better heave her over her anchor?"

They seized the chain, and a sharp, musical rattle rang out as it ran below, for the hollow hull flung back the metallic clinking like a sounding-board. When the cable was short-up, they grasped the halyards and the big gaff-mainsail rose flapping up the mast. They set it and turned to the head-sails, for though, strictly speaking, a sloop carries only one, the term is loosely applied in places, and as Vane had changed her rig, there were two of them to be hoisted.

"It's a fair wind, and I dare say we'll find more weight in it lower down," commented Carroll. "We'll let the staysail lie and run her with the jib."

When they set the jib and broke out the anchor, Vane took the helm, and the sloop, slanting over until her deck on one side dipped close to the frothing brine, drove away into the darkness. The lights of the settlement faded among the trees, and the black hills and the climbing firs on either side slipped by, streaked by sliding vapors. A crisp, splashing sound made by the curling ripples followed the vessel; the canoe surged along noisily astern; and the

frothing and gurgling grew louder at the bows. They were running down one of the deep, forest-shrouded inlets which, resembling the Norwegian fiords, pierce the Pacific littoral of Canada; though there are no Scandinavian pines to compare with the tremendous conifers which fill all the valleys and climb high to the snow-line in that wild and rugged land.

There was no sound from the cabin, and Vane decided that his guests had gone to sleep. The sloop was driving along steadily, with neither lift nor roll, but when, increasing her speed, she piled the foam up on her lee side and the canoe rode on a great white wave, he glanced toward his companion.

"I wonder how the wind is outside?" he questioned.

Carroll looked around and saw the white mists stream athwart the pines on a promontory they were skirting.

"That's more than I can tell. In these troughs among the hills, it either blows straight up or directly down, and I dare say we'll find it different when we reach the sound. One thing's certain — there's some weight in it now."

Vane nodded agreement, though an idea that troubled him crept into his mind.

"I understand that the steamboat skipper will run in to land some Siwash he's bringing down. It will be awkward in the dark if the wind's on-shore."

Carroll made no comment, and they drove on. As they swept around the point, the sloop, slanting sharply, dipped her lee rail in the froth. Ahead of them the inlet was flecked with white, and the wail

of the swaying firs came off from the shadowy beach and mingled with the gurgling of the water.

"We'll have to tie down a reef and get the canoe on board," suggested Carroll.

"Here, take the tiller a minute!"

Scrambling forward Vane rapped on the cabin slide and then flung it back. Mrs. Marvin lay upon the leeward locker with a blanket thrown over her and with the little girl at her feet; Miss Blake sat on the weather side with a book in her hand.

"We're going to take some sail off the boat," he explained. "You needn't be disturbed by the noise."

"When do you expect to meet the steamer?" Miss Blake inquired.

"Not for two or three hours, anyway."

Vane fancied that the girl noticed the hint of uncertainty in his voice, and he banged the slide to as he disappeared.

"Down helm!" he shouted to Carroll.

There was a banging and thrashing of canvas as the sloop came up into the wind. They held her there with the jib aback while they hauled the canoe on board, which was not an easy task; and then with difficulty they hove down a reef in the mainsail. It was heavy work, because there was nobody at the helm; and the craft, falling off once or twice while they leaned out upon the boom with toes on her depressed lee rail, threatened to hurl them into the frothing water. Neither of them was a trained sailor; but on that coast, with its inlets and sounds and rivers, the wanderer learns readily to handle sail and paddle and canoe-pole.

They finished their task; and when Vane seized the helm Carroll sat down under the shelter of the coaming, out of the flying spray.

"We'll probably have some trouble putting your friends on board the steamer, even if she runs in," he remarked. "What are you going to do if there's no sign of her?"

"It's a question I've been shirking for the last half-hour," Vane confessed.

"It would be very slow work beating back up this inlet; and even if we did so there isn't a stage across the island for several days. No doubt, you remember that you have to see that contractor on Thursday; and there's the directors' meeting, too."

"It's uncommonly awkward," Vane answered dubiously.

Carroll laughed.

"It strikes me that your guests will have to stay where they are, whether they like it or not; but there's one consolation — if this wind is from the northwest, which is most likely, it will be a fast run to Victoria. Guess I'll try to get some sleep."

He disappeared down a scuttle forward, leaving Vane somewhat disturbed in mind. He had contemplated taking his guests for merely a few hours' run, but to have them on board for, perhaps, several days was a very different thing. Besides, he was far from sure that they would understand the necessity for keeping them, and in that case the situation might become difficult. In the meanwhile, the sloop drove on, until at last, toward morning, the beach fell back on either hand and she met the long swell tumbling in from the Pacific. The wind was

from the northwest and blowing moderately hard; there was no light as yet in the sky above the black heights to the east; and the onrushing swell grew higher and steeper, breaking white here and there. The sloop plunged over it wildly, hurling the spray aloft; and it cost Vane a determined effort to haul in his sheets as the wind drew ahead. Shortly afterward, the beach faded altogether on one hand, and the sea piled up madly into foaming ridges. It seemed most improbable that the steamer would run in to land her Indian passengers, but Vane drove the sloop on, with showers of stinging brine beating into her wet canvas and whirling about him.

As the Pacific opened up, he found it necessary to watch the seas that came charging down upon her. They were long and high, and most of them were ridged with seething foam. With a quick pull on the tiller, he edged her over them, and a cascade swept her forward as she plunged across their crests. Though there were driving clouds above him, it was not very dark and he could see for some distance. The long ranks of tumbling combers did not look encouraging, and when the plunges grew sharper and the brine began to splash across the coaming that protected the well he wished that they had hauled down a second reef. He could not shorten sail unassisted, however; nor could he leave the helm to summon Carroll, who was evidently sleeping soundly in the forecastle, without rousing his passengers, which he did not desire to do.

A little while later he noticed that a stream of smoke was pouring from the short funnel of the stove and soon afterward the cabin slide opened. Miss

Blake crept out and stood in the well, gazing forward while she clutched the coaming.

Day was now breaking, and Vane could see that the girl's thin dress was blown flat against her. There was something graceful in her pose, and it struck him again that her figure was daintily slender. She wore no hat, and it was evident that the wild plunging had no effect on her. He waited uneasily until she turned and faced him.

"We are going out to sea," she said. "Where's the steamer?"

It was a question Vane had dreaded; but he answered it honestly.

"I can't tell you. It's very likely that she has gone straight on to Victoria."

He saw the suspicion in her suddenly hardening face, but the quick anger in it pleased him. He had not expected her to be prudish, but it was clear that the situation did not appeal to her.

"You expected this when you asked us to come on board!" she cried.

"No," Vane replied quietly; "on my honor, I did nothing of the kind. There was only a moderate breeze when we left, and when it freshened enough to make it unlikely that the steamer would run in, I was as vexed as you seem to be. As it happened, I couldn't go back; I must get on to Victoria as soon as possible."

She looked at him searchingly, but he fancied that she was slightly comforted.

"Can't you put us ashore?"

"It might be possible if I could find a sheltered beach farther on, but it wouldn't be wise. You

would find yourselves twenty or thirty miles from the nearest settlement, and you could never walk so far through the bush."

"Then what are we to do?"

There was distress in the cry, and Vane answered it in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"So far as I can see, you can only reconcile yourselves to staying on board. We'll have a fresh, fair wind for Victoria, once we're round the next head, and with moderate luck we ought to get there late to-night."

"You're sure?"

Vane felt sorry for her.

"I'm afraid I can't even promise that; it depends upon the weather," he replied. "But you mustn't stand there in the spray. You're getting wet through."

She still clung to the coaming, but he fancied that her misgivings were vanishing, and he spoke again.

"How are Mrs. Marvin and the little girl? I see you have lighted the stove."

The girl sat down, shivering, in the partial shelter of the coaming, and at last a gleam of amusement, which he felt was partly compassionate, shone in her eyes.

"I'm afraid they're — not well. That was why I kept the stove burning; I wanted to make them some tea. There is some in the locker — I thought you wouldn't mind."

"Everything's at your service, as I told you. You must make the best breakfast you can. The nicest things are at the back of the locker."

She stood up, looking around again. The light was growing, and the crests of the combers gleamed a livid white. Their steep breasts were losing their grayness and changing to dusky blue and slatey green, but their blurred coloring was atoned for by their grandeur of form. They came on, ridge on ridge, in regularly ordered, tumbling phalanxes.

"It's glorious!" she exclaimed, to his astonishment. "Aren't you carrying a good deal of sail?"

"We'll ease the peak down when we bring the wind farther aft. In the meanwhile, you'd better get your breakfast, and if you come out again, put on one of the coats you'll find below."

She disappeared, and Vane felt relieved. Though the explanation had proved less difficult than he had anticipated, he was glad that it was over, and the way in which she had changed the subject implied that she was satisfied with it. Half an hour later, she appeared again, carrying a loaded tray, and he wondered at the ease of her movements, for the sloop was plunging viciously.

"I've brought you some breakfast. You have been up all night."

Vane laughed.

"As I can take only one hand from the helm, you will have to cut up the bread and canned stuff for me. Draw out that box and sit down beneath the coaming, if you mean to stay."

She did as he told her. The well was about four feet long, and the bottom of it about half that distance below the level of the deck. As a result of this, she sat close at his feet, while he balanced himself on the coaming, gripping the tiller. He no-

ticed that she had brought out an oilskin jacket with her.

"Hadn't you better put this on first? There's a good deal of spray," she said.

Vane struggled into the jacket with some difficulty, and she smiled as she handed him up a slice of bread and canned meat.

"I suppose you can manage only one piece at a time," she laughed.

"Thank you. That's about as much as you could expect one to be capable of, even allowing for the bushman's appetite. I'm a little surprised to see you looking so fresh."

"Oh, I used to go out with the mackerel boats at home — we lived at the ferry. It was a mile across the lough, and with the wind westerly the sea worked in."

"The lough? I told Carroll that you were from the Green Isle."

It struck him that this was, perhaps, imprudent, as it implied that they had been discussing her; but, on the other hand, he fancied that the candor of the statement was in his favor.

"Have you been long out here?" he added.

The girl's face grew wistful.

"Four years. I came out with Larry — he's my brother. He was a forester at home, and he took small contracts for clearing land. Then he married — and I left him."

Vane made a sign of comprehension.

"I see. Where's Larry now?"

"He went to Oregon. There was no answer to my last letter; I've lost sight of him."

"And you go about with Mrs. Marvin? Is her husband living?"

Sudden anger flared up in the girl's blue eyes, though he knew that it was not directed against him.

"Yes! It's a pity he is! Men of his kind always seem to live!"

It occurred to Vane that Miss Blake, who evidently had a spice of temper, could be a staunch partizan, and he also noticed that now that he had inspired her with some degree of trust in himself her conversation was marked by an ingenuous candor.

"Another piece, or some tea?" she asked.

"Tea first, please."

They both laughed when she handed him a second slice of bread.

"These sandwiches strike me as unusually nice," he informed her. "It's exceptionally good tea, too. I don't remember ever getting anything to equal them at a hotel."

The blue eyes gleamed with amusement.

"You have been in the cold all night — but I was once in a restaurant." She watched the effect of this statement on him. "You know I really can't sing — I was never taught, anyway — though there were some of the settlements where we did rather well."

Vane hummed a few bars of a song.

"I don't suppose you realize what one ballad of yours has done. I'd almost forgotten the Old Country, but the night I heard you I felt I must go back and see it again. What's more, Carroll and I are going shortly — it's your doing."

This was a matter of fact; but Kitty Blake had

produced a deeper effect on him, although he was not yet aware of it.

"It's a shame to keep you handing me things to eat," he added disconnectedly. "Still, I'd like another piece."

She smiled delightfully as she passed the food to him.

"You can't help yourself and steer the boat. Besides — after the restaurant — I don't mind waiting on you."

Vane made no comment, but he watched her with satisfaction while he ate. There was no sign of the others; they were alone on the waste of tumbling water in the early dawn. The girl was pretty, and there was a pleasing daintiness about her. What was more, she was a guest of his, dependent for her safety upon his skill with the tiller. So far as he could remember, it was a year or two since he had breakfasted in a woman's company; it was certain that no woman had waited on him so prettily. Then as he remembered many a lonely camp in the dark pine forest or high on the bare rangeside, it occurred to him for the first time that he had missed a good deal of what life had to offer. He wondered what it would have been like if when he had dragged himself back to his tent at night, worn with heavy toil, as he had often done, there had been somebody with blue eyes and a delightful smile to welcome him.

Kitty Blake belonged to the people — there was no doubt of that; but then he had a strong faith in the people, native-born and adopted, of the Pacific Slope. It was from them that he had received the greatest kindnesses he could remember. They were

cheerful optimists; indomitable grapplers with forest and flood, who did almost incredible things with ax and saw and giant-powder. They lived in lonely ranch houses, tents and rudely flung-up shacks; driving the new roads along the rangeside or risking life and limb in wild-cat adits. They were quick to laughter, and reckless in hospitality.

Then with an effort he brushed the hazy thoughts away. Kitty Blake was merely a guest of his; in another day he would land her in Victoria, and that would be the end of it. He was assuring himself of this when Carroll crawled up through the scuttle forward and came aft to join them. In spite of his prudent reflections, Vane was by no means certain that he was pleased to see him.

## CHAPTER III

### AN AFTERNOON ASHORE

HALF the day had slipped by. The breeze freshened further and the sun broke through. The sloop was then rolling wildly as she drove along with the peak of her mainsail lowered down before a big following sea. The combers came up behind her, foaming and glistening blue and green, with seamy white streaks on their hollow breasts, and broke about her with a roar. Then they surged ahead while she sank down into the hollow with sluicing deck and tilted stern. Vane's face was intent as he gripped the helm; three or four miles away a head ran out from the beach he was following, and he would have to haul the boat up to windward to get around it. This would bring the combers upon her quarter, or, worse still, abeam. Kitty Blake was below; and Mrs. Marvin had made no appearance yet. Vane looked at Carroll, who was standing in the well.

"The sea's breaking more sharply, and we'd get uncommonly wet before we hammered round yonder head. There's an inlet on this side of it where we ought to find good shelter."

"The trouble is that if you stay there long you'll be too late for the directors' meeting. Besides, I'm under the impression that I've seen you run an open sea-canoe before as hard a breeze as this."

"They can't have the meeting without me, and if it's necessary they can wait," Vane answered impatiently. "I've had to. Many an hour I've spent cooling my heels in corridors and outer offices before the head of the concern could find time to attend to me. No doubt it was part of the game, done to impress me with a due sense of my unimportance."

"It's possible," Carroll laughed.

"Besides, you can drive one of those big Siwash craft as hard as you can this sloop; that is, so long as you keep the sea astern of her."

"Yes; I dare say you can. After all, you hadn't any passengers on the occasion I was referring to. I suppose you feel you have to consider them?"

Vane colored slightly.

"Naturally, I'd prefer not to land Mrs. Marvin and the child in a helpless condition; and I understand they're feeling the motion pretty badly."

Kitty Blake made her appearance in the cabin entrance, and Vane smiled at her.

"We're going to give you a rest," he announced. "There's an inlet close ahead where we should find smooth water, and we'll put you all ashore for a few hours until the wind drops."

There was no suspicion in the girl's face now. She gave him a grateful glance before she disappeared below with the consoling news.

A quarter of an hour later Vane closed with the beach, and a break in the hillside, which was dotted with wind-stunted pines, opened up. While the two men struggled with the mainsheet, the big boom and the sail above it lurched madly over. The sloop rolled down until half her deck on one side was

in the sea, but she hove herself up again and shot forward, wet and gleaming, into a space of smooth green water behind a head. Soon afterward, Vane luffed into a tiny bay, where she rode upright in the sunshine, with loose canvas flapping softly in a faint breeze while the cable rattled down. They got the canoe over, and when they had helped Mrs. Marvin and her little girl, both of whom looked very wobegone and the worse for the voyage, into her, Vane glanced around.

"Isn't Miss Blake coming?" he asked.

"She's changing her dress," explained Mrs. Marvin, with a smile. She glanced at her own crumpled attire as she added: "I'm past thinking of such things as that!"

They waited some minutes, and then Kitty appeared in the entrance to the cabin. Vane called to her.

"Won't you look in the locker, and bring along anything you think would be nice? We'll make a fire and have supper on the beach — if it isn't first-rate, you'll be responsible!"

A few minutes later they paddled ashore, and Vane landed them on a strip of shingle. Beyond it a wall of rock arose, with dark firs clinging in the rifts and crannies. The sunshine streamed into the hollow; the wind was cut off; and not far away a crystal stream came splashing down a ravine.

"There's a creek at the top of the inlet," Vane told them, as he and Carroll thrust out the canoe, "and we're going to look for a trout. You can stroll about or rest in the sun for a couple of hours, and

if the wind drops after supper we'll make a start again."

They paddled away, with a fishing-rod and a gun in the canoe, and it was toward six o'clock in the evening when they came back with a few trout. Vane made a fire of resinous wood, and Carroll and Kitty prepared a bountiful supper. When it was finished, Carroll carried the plates away to the stream; Mrs. Marvin and the little girl followed him; and Vane and Kitty were left beside the fire. She sat on a log of driftwood, and he lay on the warm shingle with his pipe in his hand. The clear green water splashed and tinkled upon the pebbles close at his feet, and a faint, elfin sighing fell from the firs above them. It was very old music: the song of the primeval wilderness; and though he had heard it often, it had a strange, unsettling effect on him as he languidly watched his companion. There was no doubt that she was pleasant to look upon; but, although he did not clearly recognize this, it was to a large extent an impersonal interest that he took in her. She was not so much an attractive young woman with qualities that pleased him as a type of something that had so far not come into his life; something which he vaguely felt that he had missed. One could have fancied that by some deep-sunk intuition she recognized this fact, and felt the security of it.

"So you believe you can get an engagement if you reach Vancouver in time?" he asked at length.

"Yes."

"How long will it last?"

"I can't tell. Perhaps a week or two. It depends upon how the boys are pleased with the show."

Vane frowned. He felt very compassionate toward her and toward all friendless women compelled to wander here and there, as she was forced to do. It seemed intolerable that she should depend for daily bread upon the manner in which a crowd of rude miners and choppers received her song; though there was, as he knew, a vein of primitive chivalry in most of them.

"Suppose it only lasts a fortnight, what will you do then?"

"I don't know," said Kitty simply.

"It must be a hard life," Vane broke out. "You must make very little — scarcely enough, I suppose, to carry you on from one engagement to another. After all, weren't you as well off at the restaurant? Didn't they treat you properly?"

She colored a little at the question.

"Oh, yes. At least, I had no fault to find with the man who kept it or with his wife."

Vane made a hasty sign of comprehension. He supposed that the difficulty had arisen from the conduct of one or more of the regular customers. He felt that he would very much like to meet the man whose undesired attentions had driven his companion from her occupation.

"Did you never try to learn keeping accounts or typewriting?" he asked.

"I tried it once. I could manage the figures, but the mill shut down."

Vane made his next suggestion casually, though he was troubled by an inward diffidence.

"I've an idea that I could find you a post. It looks as if I'm going to be a person of some little influence in the future, which"— he laughed — "is a very new thing to me."

He saw a tinge of warmer color creep into the girl's cheeks. She had, as he had already noticed a beautifully clear skin.

"No," she said decidedly; "it wouldn't do."

Vane knit his brows, though he fancied that she was right.

"Well," he replied, "I don't want to be officious — but how can I help?"

"You can't help at all."

Vane saw that she meant it, and he broke out with quick impatience:

"I've spent nine years in this country, in the hardest kind of work; but all the while I fancied that money meant power, that if I ever got enough of it I could do what I liked! Now I find that I can't do the first simple thing that would please me! What a cramped, hide-bound world it is!"

Kitty smiled in a curious manner.

"Yes; it's a very cramped world to some of us; but complaining won't do any good." She paused with a faint sigh. "Don't spoil this evening. You and Mr. Carroll have been very kind. It's so quiet and calm here — though it was pleasant on board the yacht — and soon we'll have to go to work again."

Vane once more was stirred by a sense of pity which almost drove him to rash and impulsive speech; but her manner restrained him.

"Then you must be fond of the sea," he suggested.

"I love it! I was born beside it — where the big,

green hills drop to the head of the water and you can hear the Atlantic rumble on the rocks all night long."

"Ah!" exclaimed Vane; "don't you long for another sight of it now and then?"

The girl smiled in a way that troubled him.

"I'm wearying for it always; and some day, perhaps, I'll win back for another glimpse at the old place."

"You wouldn't go to stay?"

"That would be impossible! What would I do yonder, after this other life? Once you leave the old land, you can never quite get back again."

Vane lay smoking in silence for a minute or two. On another occasion he had felt the thrill of the exile's longing that spoke through the girl's song, and now he recognized the truth of what she said. One changed in the West, acquiring a new outlook which diverged more and more from that held by those at home. Only a wistful tenderness for the motherland remained. Still, alien in thought and feeling as he had become, he was going back there for a time; and she, as she had said, must resume her work. A feeling of anger at his impotence to alter this came upon him.

Then Carroll came up with Mrs. Marvin and Elsie, and he felt strongly stirred when the little girl walked up to him shyly with a basket filled with shells and bright fir-cones. He drew her down beside him with an arm about her waist while he examined her treasures. Glancing up he met Kitty's eyes and felt his face grow hot with an emotion he failed to analyze. The little mite was frail and delicate; life, he sur-

mised, had scanty pleasure to offer her; but now she was happy.

"They're so pretty, and there are such lots of them!" she exclaimed. "Can't we stay here just a little longer and gather some more?"

"Yes," answered Vane, conscious that Carroll, who had heard the question, was watching him. "You shall stay and get as many as you want. I'm afraid you don't like the sloop."

"No; I don't like it when it jumps. After I woke up, it jumped all the time."

"Never mind, little girl. The boat will keep still to-night, and I don't think there'll be any waves to roll her about to-morrow. We'll have you ashore the first thing in the morning."

He talked to her for a few minutes, and then strolled along the beach with Carroll until they could look out upon the Pacific. The breeze was falling, though the sea still ran high.

"Why did you promise that child to stay here?" Carroll asked.

"Because I felt like doing so."

"I needn't remind you that you've an appointment with Horsfield about the smelter; and there's a meeting of the board next day. If we started now and caught the first steamer across, you wouldn't have much time to spare."

"That's correct. I shall have to wire from Victoria that I've been detained."

Carroll laughed expressively.

"Do you mean to put off the meeting and keep your directors waiting, to please a child?"

"I suppose that's one reason. Anyway, I don't

propose to hustle the little girl and her mother on board the steamer while they're helpless with sea-sickness." A gleam of humor crept into his eyes. "As I think I told you, I've no great objections to letting the gentlemen you mentioned await my pleasure."

"But they found you the shareholders, and set the concern on its feet."

"Just so. On the other hand, they got excellent value for their services — and I found the mine. What's more, during the preliminary negotiations most of them treated me very casually."

"Well?"

"There's going to be a difference now. I've a board of directors — one way or another, I've had to pay for the privilege pretty dearly; but it's not my intention that they should run the Clermont Mine."

Carroll glanced at him with open amusement. There had been a marked change in Vane since he had located the mine, though it was one that did not astonish his comrade. Carroll had long suspected him of latent capabilities, which had suddenly sprung to life.

"You ought to see Horsfield before you meet the board," he advised him.

"I'm not sure," Vane answered. "In fact, I'm uncertain whether I'll give Horsfield the contract, even if we decide about the smelter. He was offensively patronizing once upon a time and tried to bluff me. Besides, he has already a stake in the concern. I don't want a man with too firm a hold-up against me."

"But if he put his money in partly with the idea of getting certain pickings?"

"He didn't explain his intentions; and I made no promises. He'll get his dividends, or he can sell his stock at a premium, and that ought to satisfy him."

"If you submitted the whole case to a business man, he'd probably tell you that you were going to make a hash of things."

"That's your own idea?"

Carroll grinned.

"Oh, I'll reserve my opinion. It's possible you may be right. Time will show."

They rejoined the others, and when the white mists crept lower down from the heights above and the chill of the dew was in the air, Vane launched the canoe.

"It's getting late and there's a long run in front of us to-morrow," he informed his passengers. "The sloop will lie as still as if moored in a pond; and you'll have her all to yourselves. Carroll and I are going to camp ashore."

He paddled them off to the boat. Coming back with some blankets, he cut a few armfuls of spruce twigs in a ravine and spread them out beside the fire. Then sitting down just clear of the scented smoke he lighted his pipe and asked an abrupt question.

"What do you think of Kitty Blake?"

"She's attractive, in person and manners."

"Anybody could see that at a glance!"

"Well," Carroll added cautiously, "I must confess that I've taken some interest in the girl — partly because you were obviously doing so. In a general

way, what I noticed rather surprised me. It wasn't what I expected."

"You smart folks are as often wrong as the rest of us. I suppose you looked for cold-blooded assurance, tempered by what one might call experienced coquetry?"

"Something of the kind," Carroll agreed. "As you say, I was wrong. There are only two ways of explaining Miss Blake, and the first's the one that would strike most people. That is, she's acting a part, possibly with an object; holding her natural self in check, and doing it cleverly."

Vane laughed scornfully.

"I've lived in the woods for nine years, but I wouldn't have entertained that idea for five seconds!"

"Then, there's the other explanation. It's simply that the girl's life hasn't affected her. Somehow, she has kept fresh and wholesome. I think that's the correct view."

"There's no doubt of it!" declared Vane.

"You offered to help her in some way?"

"I did; I don't know how you guessed it. I said I'd find her a situation. She wouldn't hear of it."

"She was wise. Vancouver isn't a very big place yet, and the girl has more sense than you have. What did you say?"

"I'm afraid I lost my temper because there was nothing I could do."

Carroll grinned.

"There are limitations — even to the power of the dollar. You'll probably run up against more of them later on."

"I suppose so," yawned Vane. "Well, I'm going to sleep."

He rolled himself up in his blanket and lay down among the soft spruce twigs, but Carroll sat still in the darkness and smoked out his pipe. Then he glanced at his comrade, who lay still, breathing evenly.

"No doubt you'd be considered fortunate," he said, apostrophizing him half aloud. "You've had power and responsibility thrust upon you. What will you make of it?"

Then he, too, lay down, and only the soft splash of the tiny ripples broke the silence while the fire sank lower.

They sailed the next morning, and when they arrived in Victoria the boat which crossed the straits had gone, but the breeze was fair from the westward, and, after despatching a telegram, Vane sailed again. The sloop made a quick passage, and most of the time her passengers lounged in the sunshine on her gently slanted deck. It was evening when they ran through the Narrows into Vancouver's land-locked harbor and saw the roofs of the city rise tier on tier from the water-front. Somber forest crept down to the skirts of it, and across the glistening water black hills ran up into the evening sky, with the blink of towering snow to the north of them.

Half an hour later Vane landed his passengers, and it was not until he had left them that they discovered he had thrust a roll of paper currency into the little girl's hand. Then he and Carroll set off for the C. P. R. hotel, although they were not accustomed to a hostelry of that sort.

## CHAPTER IV

### A CHANGE OF ENVIRONMENT

ON the evening after his arrival in Vancouver, Vane paid a visit to one of his directors; and, in accordance with the invitation, he and Carroll reached the latter's dwelling some little time before the arrival of several other guests, whose acquaintance it was considered advisable he should make. In the business parts of most western cities iron and stone have now replaced the native lumber, but on their outskirts wood is still employed with admirable effect as a building material, and Nairn's house was an example of the judicious use of the latter. It stood on a rise above the inlet; picturesque in outline, with its artistic scroll-work, its wooden pillars, its lattice shutters and its balustraded verandas. Virgin forest crept up close about it, and there was no fence to the sweep of garden which divided it from the road.

Vane and his companion were ushered into a small room, with an uncovered floor and simple, hardwood furniture. It was obviously a working room, for, as a rule, the work of the western business man goes on continuously except when he is asleep; but a somewhat portly lady with a good-humored face reclined in a rocking chair. A gaunt, elderly man of rugged appearance rose from his seat at a writing-table as his guests entered.

"So ye have come at last," he said. "I had ye shown in here, because this room is mine, and I can smoke when I like. The rest of the house is Mrs. Nairn's, and it seems that her friends do not appreciate the smell of my cigars. I'm no sure that I can blame them."

Mrs. Nairn smiled placidly.

"Alic," she explained, "leaves them lying everywhere, and I do not like the stubs of them on the stairs. But sit ye down and he will give ye one."

Vane felt at home with both of them. He had met people of their kind before, and, allowing for certain idiosyncrasies, considered them the salt of the Dominion. Nairn had done good service to his adopted country, developing her industries — with some profit to himself, for he was of Scottish extraction; but, while close at a bargain, he could be generous afterward. In the beginning, he had fought sternly for his own hand, and it was supposed that Mrs. Nairn had helped him, not only by sound advice, but by such practical economies as the making of his working clothes. Those he wore on the evening in question did not fit him well, though they were no longer the work of her capable fingers. When his guests were seated he laid two cigar boxes on the table.

"Those," he said, pointing to one of them, "are mine. I think ye had better try the others; they're for visitors."

Vane had already noticed the aroma of the cigar that was smoldering on a tray and he decided that Nairn was right; so he dipped his hand into the second box, which he passed to Carroll.

"Now," declared Nairn, "we can talk comfortably.

Clara will listen. Afterwards, it's possible she will favor me with her opinion."

Mrs. Nairn smiled at them encouragingly, and her husband proceeded.

"One or two of my colleagues were no pleased at ye for putting off the meeting."

"The sloop was small, and it was blowing rather hard," Vane explained.

"Maybe. For all that, the tone of your message was no altogether what one would call conciliatory. It informed us that ye would arrange for the postponed meeting at your earliest convenience. Ye did not mention ours."

"I pointed that out to him, and he said it didn't matter," Carroll interrupted with a laugh.

Nairn spread out his hands in expostulation, but there was dry appreciation in his eyes.

"Young blood must have its way." He paused and looked thoughtful. "Ye will no have said anything definite to Horsfield yet about the smelter?"

"No. So far, I'm not sure that it would pay us to put up the plant; and the other man's terms are lower."

"Maybe," Nairn answered, and he made the single word very expressive. "Ye have had the handling of the thing; but henceforward it will be necessary to get the sanction of the board. However, ye will meet Horsfield to-night. We expect him and his sister."

Vane thought he had been favored with a hint, but he fancied also that his host was not inimical and was merely reserving his judgment with Caledonian caution. Nairn changed the subject.

"So ye're going to England for a holiday. Ye

will have friends who'll be glad to see ye yonder?"

"I've one sister, but no other near relatives. But I expect to spend some time with people you know. The Chisholms are old family friends, and, as you will remember, it was through them that I first approached you."

Then, obeying one of the impulses which occasionally swayed him, he turned to Mrs. Nairn.

"I'm grateful to them for sending me the letter of introduction to your husband, because in many ways I'm in his debt. He didn't treat me as the others did when I first went round this city with a few mineral specimens."

He had expected nothing when he spoke, but there was a responsive look in the lady's face which hinted that he had made a friend. As a matter of fact, he owed a good deal to his host. There is a vein of human kindness in the Scot, and he is often endowed with a keen, half-instinctive judgment of his fellows which renders him less likely to be impressed by outward appearances and the accidental advantages of polished speech or tasteful dress than his southern neighbors. Vane would have had even more trouble in floating his company had not Nairn been satisfied with him.

"So ye are meaning to stay with Chisholm!" the latter exclaimed. "We had Evelyn here two years ago, and Clara said something about her coming out again."

"It's nine years since I saw Evelyn."

"Then there's a surprise in store for ye. I believe they've a bonny place — and there's no doubt Chisholm will make ye welcome."

The slight pause was expressive. It implied that Nairn, who had a somewhat biting humor, could furnish a reason for Chisholm's hospitality if he desired, and Vane was confirmed in this supposition when he saw the warning look which his hostess cast at her husband.

"It's likely that we'll have Evelyn again in the fall," she said hastily. "It's a very small world, Mr. Vane."

"It's a far cry from Vancouver to England," Vane replied. "How did you first come to know Chisholm?"

Nairn answered him.

"Our acquaintance began with business. A concern that he was chairman of had invested in British Columbian mining stock; and he's some kind of connection of Colquhoun's."

Colquhoun was a man of some importance, who held a Crown appointment, and Vane felt inclined to wonder why Chisholm had not sent him a letter to him. Afterward, he guessed at the reason, which was not flattering to himself or his host. Nairn and he chatted a while on business topics, until there was a sound of voices below, and going down in company with Mrs. Nairn they found two or three new arrivals in the entrance hall. More came in; and when they sat down to supper, Vane was given a place beside a young lady whom he had already met.

Jessy Horsfield was about his own age; tall and slight in figure, with regular features, a rather colorless face, and eyes of a cold, light blue. There was, however, something striking in her appearance, and Vane was gratified by her graciousness to him. Her

brother sat almost opposite them: a tall, spare man, with a somewhat expressionless countenance, except for the aggressive hardness in his eyes. Vane had noticed this look, and it had aroused his dislike, but he had not observed it in the eyes of Miss Horsfield, though it was present now and then. Nor did he realize that while she chatted she was unobtrusively studying him. She had not favored him with much notice when she was in his company on a previous occasion; he had been a man of no importance then.

He was now dressed in ordinary attire, and the well-cut garments displayed his lean, athletic figure. His face, Miss Horsfield decided, was a good one: not exactly handsome, but attractive in its frankness; and she liked the way he had of looking steadily at the person he addressed. Though he had been, as she knew, a wandering chopper, a survey packer, and, for a time, an unsuccessful prospector, there was no coarsening stamp of toil on him. Indeed, the latter is not common in the West, where as yet the division of employments is not practised to the extent it is in older countries. Specialization has its advantages; but it brands a man's profession upon him and renders it difficult for him to change it. Except for the clear bronze of his skin, Vane might just have left a Government office, or have come out from London or Montreal. He was, moreover, a man whose acquaintance might be worth cultivating.

"I suppose you are glad you have finished your work in the bush," she remarked presently. "It must be nice to get back to civilization."

Vane smiled as he glanced round the room. It ran right across the house, and through the open windows

came the clank of a locomotive bell down by the wharf and the rattle of a steamer's winch. The sounds appealed to him. They suggested organized activity, the stir of busy life; and it was pleasant to hear them after the silence of the bush. The gleam of snowy linen, dainty glass and silver caught his eye; and the hum of careless voices and the light laughter were soothing.

"Yes; it's remarkably nice after living for nine years in the wilderness, with only an occasional visit to some little wooden town."

A fresh dish was laid before him, and his companion smiled.

"You didn't get things of this kind among the pines."

"No," laughed Vane. "In fact, cookery is one of the bushman's trials; anyway, when he's working for himself. You come back dead tired, and often very wet, to your lonely tent, and then there's a fire to make and supper to get before you can rest. It happens now and then that you're too played out to trouble, and you go to sleep instead."

"Dreadful!" sympathized the girl. "But you have been in Vancouver before?"

"Except on the last occasion, I stayed down near the water-front. We were not provided with luxurious quarters or with suppers of this kind there."

"It's romantic; and, though you're glad it's over, there must be some satisfaction in feeling that you owe the change to your own efforts. I mean it must be nice to think one has captured a fair share of the good things of life, instead of having them accidentally thrust upon one. Doesn't it give you a feeling that

in some degree you're master of your fate? I should like that!"

It was subtle flattery, and there were reasons why it appealed to the man. He had worked for others, sometimes for inadequate wages, and had wandered about the Province, dusty and footsore, in search of employment, besides being beaten down at many a small bargain by richer or more fortunately situated men. Now, however, he had resolved that there should be a difference; instead of begging favors, he would dictate terms.

"I should have imagined it," he laughed, in answer to her last remark; and he was right, for Jessy Horsfield was a clever woman who loved power and influence.

Vane dropped his napkin, and was stooping to pick it up when an attendant handed it back to him. He noticed and responded to the glimmer of amusement in his companion's eyes.

"We are not accustomed to being waited on in the bush," he explained. "It takes some time to get used to the change. When we wanted anything there we got it for ourselves."

"Is that, in its wider sense, a characteristic of most bushmen?"

"I don't quite follow."

The girl laughed.

"I suppose one could divide men into two classes: those who are able to get the things they desire for themselves — which implies the possession of certain eminently useful qualities — and those who have them given to them. In Canada the former are the more numerous."

"There's a third division," Vane corrected her, with a trace of grimness. "I mean those who want a good many things and have to learn to do without. It strikes me they're the most numerous of all."

"It's no doubt excellent discipline," retorted his companion.

She looked at him boldly, for she was interested in the man and was not afraid of personalities.

"In any case, you have now passed out of that division."

Vane sat silent for the next few moments. Up to the age of eighteen most of his reasonable wishes had been gratified. Then had come a startling change, and he had discovered in the Dominion that he must lead a life of Spartan self-denial. He had had the strength to do so, and for nine years he had resolutely banished most natural longings. Amusements, in some of which he excelled, the society of women, all the small amenities of life, were things which must be foregone, and he had forced himself to be content with food and, as a rule, very indifferent shelter. This, as his companion suggested, had proved a wholesome discipline, since it had not soured him. Now, though he did not overvalue them, he rejoiced in his new surroundings, and the girl's comeliness and quickness of comprehension had their full effect.

"It was you who located the Clermont Mine, wasn't it?" she went on. "I read something about it in the papers — I think they said it was copper ore."

This vagueness was misleading, for her brother had given her a good deal of definite information about the mine.

"Yes," replied Vane, willing to take up any subject

she suggested; "it's copper ore, but there's some silver combined with it. Of course, the value of any ore depends upon two things — the percentage of the metal, and the cost of extracting it."

Her interest was flattering, and he added:

"In both respects, the Clermont product is promising."

After that he did not remember what they talked about; but the time passed rapidly and he was surprised when Mrs. Nairn rose and the company drifted away by twos and threes toward the veranda. Left by himself a moment, he came upon Carroll sauntering down a corridor.

"I've had a chat with Horsfield," Carroll remarked.

"Well?"

"He may merely have meant to make himself agreeable, and he may have wished to extract information about you. If the latter was his object, he was not successful."

"Ah! Nairn's straight, anyway, and to be relied on. I like him and his wife."

"So do I, though they differ from some of the others. There's not much gilding on either of them."

"It's not needed; they're sterling metal."

"That's my own idea."

Carroll moved away and Vane strolled out onto the veranda, where Horsfield joined him a few minutes later.

"I don't know whether it's a very suitable time to mention it; but may I ask whether you are any nearer a decision about that smelter? Candidly, I'd like the contract."

"I am not," Vane answered. "I can't make up my mind, and I may postpone the matter indefinitely. It might prove more profitable to ship the ore out for reduction."

Horsfield examined his cigar.

"Of course, I can't press you; but I may, perhaps, suggest that, as we'll have to work together in other matters, I might be able to give you a quid pro quo."

"That occurred to me. On the other hand, I don't know how much importance I ought to attach to the consideration."

His companion laughed with apparent good-humor.

"Oh, well; I must wait until you're ready."

He strolled away, and presently joined his sister.

"How does Vane strike you?" he asked. "You seem to get on with him."

"I've an idea that you won't find him easy to influence," answered the girl, looking at her brother pointedly.

"I'm inclined to agree with you. In spite of that, he's a man whose acquaintance is worth cultivating."

He passed on to speak to Nairn; and shortly afterward Vane sat down beside Jessy in a corner of a big room. Looking out across the veranda, he could see far-off snowy heights tower in cold silver tracery against the green of the evening sky. Voices and laughter reached him, and now and then some of the guests strolled through the room. It was pleasant to lounge there and feel that Miss Horsfield had taken him under her wing, which seemed to describe her attitude toward him. She was handsome, and he noticed how finely the soft, neutral tinting of her attire, which was neither blue nor altogether gray, matched

the azure of her eyes and emphasized the dead-gold coloring of her hair.

"As Mrs. Nairn tells me you are going to England, I suppose we shall not see you in Vancouver for some months," she said presently. "This city really isn't a bad place to live in."

Vane felt gratified. She had implied that he would be an acquisition and had included him among the number of her acquaintances.

"I fancy that I shall find it a particularly pleasant place," he responded. "Indeed, I'm inclined to be sorry that I've made arrangements to leave it very shortly."

"That is pure good-nature," laughed his companion.

"No; it's what I really feel."

Jessy let this pass.

"Mrs. Nairn mentioned that you know the Chisholms."

"I'd better say that I used to do so. They have probably changed out of my knowledge, and they can scarcely remember me except by name."

"But you are going to see them?"

"I expect to spend some time with them."

Jessy changed the subject, and Vane found her conversation entertaining. She appealed to his artistic perceptions and his intelligence, and it must be admitted that she laid herself out to do so. She said nothing of any consequence, but she knew how to make a glance or a changed inflection expressive. He was sorry when she left him, but she smiled at him before she moved away.

"If you and Mr. Carroll care to call, I am generally at home in the afternoon," she said.

She crossed the room, and Vane joined Nairn and remained near him until he took his departure.

Late the next afternoon, an hour or two after an Empress liner from China and Japan had arrived, he and Carroll reached the C. P. R. station. The Atlantic train was waiting and an unusual number of passengers were hurrying about the cars. They were, for the most part, prosperous people: business men, and tourists from England going home that way; and when Vane found Mrs. Marvin and Kitty, he once more was conscious of a stirring of compassion. The girl's dress, which had struck him as becoming on the afternoon they spent on the beach, now looked shabby. In Mrs. Marvin's case, the impression was more marked, and standing amid the bustling throng with the child clinging to her hand she looked curiously forlorn. Kitty smiled at him diffidently.

"You have been so kind," she began, and, pausing, added with a tremor in her voice: "But the tickets —"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Vane. "If it will ease your mind, you can send me what they cost after the first full house you draw."

"How shall we address you?"

"Clermont Mineral Exploitation. I don't want to think I'm going to lose sight of you."

Kitty looked away from him a moment, and then looked back.

"I'm afraid you must make up your mind to that," she said.

Vane could not remember his answer, though he afterward tried; but just then an official strode along beside the cars, calling to the passengers, and when a

bell began tolling Vane hurried the girl and her companions onto a platform. Mrs. Marvin entered the car, Elsie held up her face to kiss him before she disappeared, and he and Kitty were left alone. She held out her hand, and a liquid gleam crept into her eyes.

"We can't thank you properly," she murmured. "Good-by!"

"No," Vane protested. "You mustn't say that."

"Yes," answered Kitty firmly, but with signs of effort. "It's good-by. You'll be carried on in a moment!"

Vane gazed down at her, and afterward wondered at what he did, but she looked so forlorn and desolate, and the pretty face was so close to his. Stooping swiftly, he kissed her, and had a thrilling fancy that she did not recoil; then the cars lurched forward and he swung himself down. They slid past him, clanking, while he stood and gazed after them. Turning around, he was by no means pleased to see that Nairn was regarding him with quiet amusement.

"Been seeing the train away?" the latter suggested. "It's a popular diversion with idle folk."

"I was saying good-by to somebody I met on the west coast," Vane explained.

"Weel," chuckled Nairn, "she has bonny een."

## CHAPTER V

### THE OLD COUNTRY

A MONTH after Vane said good-by to Kitty he and Carroll alighted one evening at a little station in northern England. Brown moors stretched about it, for the heather had not bloomed yet, rolling back in long slopes to the high ridge which cut against leaden thunder-clouds in the eastern sky. To the westward, they fell away; and across a wide, green valley smooth-backed heights gave place in turn to splintered crags and ragged pinnacles etched in gray and purple on a vivid saffron glow. The road outside the station gleamed with water, and a few big drops of rain came splashing down, but there was a bracing freshness in the mountain air.

The train went on, and Vane stood still, looking about him with a poignant recollection of how he had last waited on that platform, sick at heart, but gathering his youthful courage for the effort that he must make. It all came back to him — the dejection, the sense of loneliness — for he was then going out to the Western Dominion in which he had not a friend. Now he was returning, moderately prosperous and successful; but once again the feeling of loneliness was with him — most of those whom he had left behind had made a longer journey than he had done. Then he noticed an elderly man, in rather shabby liv-

ery, approaching, and he held out his hand with a smile of pleasure.

"You haven't changed a bit, Jim!" he exclaimed. "Have you got the young gray in the new cart outside?"

"T' owd gray was shot twelve months since," the man replied. "Broke his leg comin' down Hartop Bank. New car was sold off, done, two or t'ree years ago."

"That's bad news. Anyway, you're the same."

"A bit stiffer in the joints, and maybe a bit sourer," was the answer. Then the man's wrinkled face relaxed. "I'm main glad to see thee, Mr. Wallace. Master wad have come, only he'd t' gan t' Manchester suddenly."

Vane helped him to place their baggage into the trap and then bade him sit behind; and as he gathered up the reins, he glanced at the horse and harness. The one did not show the breeding of the gray he remembered, and there was no doubt that the other was rather the worse for wear. They set off down the descending road, which wound, unconfined, through the heather, where the raindrops sparkled like diamonds. Farther down, they ran in between rough limestone walls with gleaming spar in them, smothered here and there in trailing brambles and clumps of fern, while the streams that poured out from black gaps in the peat and flowed beside the road flashed with coppery gold in the evening light. It was growing brighter ahead of them, though inky clouds still clung to the moors behind.

By and by, ragged hedges, rent and twisted by the winds, climbed up to meet them, and, clattering down

between the straggling greenery, they crossed a river sparkling over banks of gravel. After that, there was a climb, for the country rolled in ridge and valley, and the crags ahead, growing nearer, rose in more rugged grandeur against the paling glow. Carroll gazed about him in open appreciation as they drove.

"This little compact country is really wonderful, in its way!" he exclaimed. "There's so much squeezed into it, even leaving out your towns. Parts of it are like Ontario — the southern strip I mean — with the plow-land, orchards and homesteads sprinkled among the woods and rolling ground. Then your Midlands are like the prairie, only that they're greener — there's the same sweep of grass and the same sweep of sky, and this"— he gazed at the rugged hills rent by winding dales —"is British Columbia on a miniature scale."

"Yes," agreed Vane; "it isn't monotonous."

"Now you have hit it! That's the precise difference. We've three belts of country, beginning at Labrador and running west — rock and pine scrub, level prairie, and ranges piled on ranges beyond the Rockies. Hundreds of leagues of each of them, and, within their limits, all the same. But this country's mixed. You can get what you like — woods, smooth grass-land, mountains — in a few hours' ride."

Vane smiled.

"Our people and their speech and habits are mixed, too. There's more difference between county and county in thirty miles than there is right across your whole continent. You're cast in the one mold."

"I'm inclined to think it's a good one," laughed Carroll. "What's more, it has set its stamp on you.

The very way your clothes hang proclaims that you're a Westerner."

Vane laughed good-humoredly; but as they clattered through a sleepy hamlet with its little, square-towered church overhanging a brawling river, his face grew grave. Pulling up the horse, he handed the reins to Carroll.

"This is the first stage of my pilgrimage. I won't keep you five minutes."

He swung himself down, and the groom motioned to him.

"West of the tower, Mr. Wallace; just before you reach the porch."

Vane passed through the wicket in the lichened limestone wall, and there was a troubled look in his eyes when he came back and took the reins again.

"I went away in bitterness — and I'm sorry now," he said. "The real trouble was unimportant; I think it was forgotten. Every now and then the letters came; but the written word is cold. There are things that can never be set quite right in this world."

Carroll made no comment, though he knew that if it had not been for the bond between them his comrade would not have spoken so. They drove on in silence for a while, and then, as they entered a deep, wooded dale, Vane turned to him again.

"I've been taken right back into the old days tonight; days in England, and afterward those when we worked on the branch road beneath the range. There's not a boy among the crowd in the sleeping-shack I can't recall — first, wild Larry, who taught me how to drill and hid my rawness from the Construction Boss."

"He lent me his gum-boots when the muskeg stiffened into half-frozen slush," Carroll interrupted him.

"And was smashed by the snowslide," Vane went on. "Then there was Tom, from the boundary country. He packed me back a league to camp the day I chopped my right foot; and went down in the lumber schooner off Flattery. Black Pete, too, who held onto you in the rapid when we were running the bridge-logs through. It was in firing a short fuse that he got his discharge." He raised his free hand, with a wry smile. "Gone on — with more of their kind after them; a goodly company. Why are we left prosperous? What have we done?"

Carroll made no response. The question was unanswerable, and after a while Vane abruptly began to talk about their business in British Columbia. It passed the time; and he had resumed his usual manner when he pulled up where a stile path led across a strip of meadow.

"You can drive round; we'll be there before you," he said to the groom as he got down.

Carroll and he crossed the meadow. Passing around a clump of larches they came suddenly into sight of an old gray house with a fir wood rolling down the hillside close behind it. The building was long and low, weather-worn and stained with lichens where the creepers and climbing roses left the stone exposed. The bottom row of mullioned windows opened upon a terrace, and in front of the terrace ran a low wall with a broad coping on which were placed urns bright with geraniums. It was pierced by an opening approached by shallow stairs on which an

iridescent peacock stood, and in front of all that stretched a sweep of lawn.

A couple of minutes later, a lady met them in the wide hall, and held out her hand to Vane. She was middle-aged, and had once been handsome, but now there were wrinkles about her eyes, which had a hint of hardness in them, and her lips were thin. Carroll noticed that they closed tightly when she was not speaking.

"Welcome home, Wallace," she said effusively. "It should not be difficult to look upon the Dene as that — you were here so often once upon a time."

"Thank you," was the response. "I felt tempted to ask Jim to drive me round by Low Wood; I wanted to see the place again."

"I'm glad you didn't. The house is shut up and going to pieces. It would have been depressing to-night."

Vane presented Carroll. Mrs. Chisholm's manner was gracious, but for no particular reason Carroll wondered whether she would have extended the same welcome to his comrade had the latter not come back the discoverer of a profitable mine.

"Tom was sorry he couldn't wait to meet you, but he had to leave for Manchester on some urgent business," she apologized.

Just then a girl with disordered hair and an unusual length of stocking displayed beneath her scanty skirt came up to them.

"This is Mabel," said Mrs. Chisholm. "I hardly think you will remember her."

"I've carried her across the meadow."

The girl greeted the strangers demurely, and favored Vane with a critical gaze.

"So you're Wallace Vane — who floated the Clermont Mine! Though I don't remember you, I've heard a good deal about you lately. Very pleased to make your acquaintance!"

Vane's eyes twinkled as he shook hands with her. Her manner was quaintly formal, but he fancied that there was a spice of mischief hidden behind it. Carroll, watching his hostess, surmised that her daughter's remarks had not altogether pleased her. She chatted with them, however, until the man who had driven them appeared with their baggage, when they were shown their respective rooms.

Vane was the first to go down. Reaching the hall, he found nobody there, though a clatter of dishes and a clink of silver suggested that a meal was being laid out in an adjoining room. Sitting down near the hearth, he looked about him. The house was old; a wide stairway with a quaintly carved balustrade of dark oak ran up one side and led to a landing, also fronted with ponderous oak rails. The place was shadowy, but a stream of light from a high window struck athwart one part of it and fell upon the stairs.

Vane's eyes rested on many objects that he recognized, but as his glance traveled to and fro it occurred to him that much of what he saw conveyed a hint that economy was needful. Part of the rich molding of the Jacobean mantel had fallen away, and patches of the key pattern bordering the panels beneath it had broken off, though he decided that a clever cabinet-maker could have repaired the damage in a day. There were one or two choice rugs on the

floor, but they were threadbare; the heavy hangings about the inner doors were dingy and moth-eaten; and, though all this was in harmony with the drowsy quietness and the faint smell of decay, it had its significance.

Presently he heard footsteps, and looking up he saw a girl descending the stairs in the fading stream of light. She was clad in trailing white, which gleamed against the dark oak and rustled softly as it flowed about a tall, finely outlined and finely poised figure. She had hair of dark brown with paler lights in its curling tendrils, gathered back from a neck that showed a faintly warmer whiteness than the snowy fabric below it. It was her face, though, that seized Vane's attention: the level brows; the quiet, deep brown eyes; the straight, cleanly-cut nose; and the subtle suggestion of steadfastness and pride which they all conveyed. He rose with a cry that had pleasure and eagerness in it.

"Evelyn!"

She came down, moving lightly but with a rhythmic grace, and laid a firm, cool hand in his.

"I'm glad to see you back, Wallace," she said. "How you have changed!"

"I'm not sure that's kind," smiled Vane. "In some ways, you haven't changed at all; I would have known you anywhere!"

"Nine years is a long time to remember any one."

Vane had seen few women during that period; but he was not a fool, and he recognized that this was no occasion for an attempt at gallantry. There was nothing coquettish in Evelyn's words, nor was there any irony. She had answered in the tranquil, matter-of-

fact manner which, as he remembered, usually characterized her.

"It's a little while since you landed, isn't it?" she added.

"A week. I had some business in London, and then I went on to look up Lucy. She had just gone up to town — to a congress, I believe — and so I missed her. I shall go up again to see her as soon as she answers my letter."

"It won't be necessary. She's coming here for a fortnight."

"That's very kind. Whom have I to thank for suggesting it?"

"Does it matter? It was a natural thing to ask your only sister — who is a friend of mine. There is plenty of room, and the place is quiet."

"It didn't used to be. If I remember, your mother generally had it full part of the year."

"Things have changed," said Evelyn quietly.

Vane was baffled by something in her manner. Evelyn had never been effusive — that was not her way — but now, while she was cordial, she did not seem disposed to resume their acquaintance where it had been broken off. After all, he could hardly have expected this.

"Mabel is like you, as you used to be," he observed. "It struck me as soon as I saw her; but when she began to talk there was a difference."

Evelyn laughed softly.

"Yes; I think you're right in both respects. Mopsy has the courage of her convictions. She's an open rebel."

There was no bitterness in her laugh. Evelyn's

manner was never pointed; but Vane fancied that she had said a meaning thing — one that might explain what he found puzzling in her attitude, when he held the key to it.

"Mopsy was dubious about you before you arrived, but I'm pleased to say she seems reassured," she laughed.

Carroll came down, and a few moments later Mrs. Chisholm appeared and they went in to dinner in a low-ceilinged room. During the general conversation, Mabel suddenly turned to Vane.

"I suppose you have brought your pistols with you?"

"I haven't owned one since I was sixteen," Vane laughed.

The girl looked at him with an excellent assumption of incredulity.

"Then you have never shot anybody in British Columbia!"

Carroll laughed, as if this greatly pleased him, but Vane's face was rather grave as he answered her.

"No; I'm thankful to say that I haven't. In fact, I've never seen a shot fired, except at a grouse or a deer."

"Then the West must be getting what the Archdeacon — he's Flora's husband, you know — calls decadent," the girl sighed.

"She's incorrigible," Mrs. Chisholm interposed with a smile.

Carroll leaned toward Mabel confidentially.

"In case you feel very badly disappointed, I'll let you into a secret. When we feel real, real savage, we take the ax instead."

Evelyn fancied that Vane winced at this, but Mabel looked openly regretful.

"Can either of you pick up a handkerchief going at full gallop on horseback?" she inquired.

"I'm sorry to say that I can't; and I've never seen Wallace do so," Carroll laughed.

Mrs. Chisholm shook her head at her daughter.

"Miss Clifford complained of your inattention to the study of English last quarter," she reproved severely.

Mabel made no answer, though Vane thought it would have relieved her to grimace.

Presently the meal came to an end, and an hour afterward, Mrs. Chisholm rose from her seat in the lamplit drawing-room.

"We keep early hours at the Dene, but you will retire when you like," she said. "As Tom is away, I had better tell you that you will find syphons and whisky in the smoking-room. I have had the lamp lighted."

"Thank you," Vane replied with a smile. "I'm afraid you have taken more trouble on our account than you need have done. Except on special occasions, we generally confine ourselves to strong green tea."

Mabel looked at him in amazement.

"Oh!" she cried. "The West is certainly decadent! You should be here when the otter hounds are out. Why, it was only —"

She broke off abruptly beneath her mother's withering glance.

When Vane and Carroll were left alone, they strolled out, pipe in hand, upon the terrace. They could see

the fells tower darkly against the soft sky, and a tarn that lay in the blackness of the valley beneath them was revealed by its pale gleam. A wonderful mingling of odors stole out of the still summer night.

"I suppose you could put in a few weeks here?" Vane remarked.

"I could," Carroll replied. "There's an atmosphere about these old houses that appeals to me, perhaps because we have nothing like it in Canada. The tranquillity of age is in it — it's restful, as a change. Besides, I think your friends mean to make things pleasant."

"I'm glad you like them."

Carroll knew that his comrade would not resent a candid expression of opinion.

"I do; the girls in particular. They interest me. The younger one's of a type that's common in our country, though it's generally given room for free development into something useful there. Mabel's chafing at the curb. It remains to be seen whether she'll kick, presently, and hurt herself in doing so."

Vane remembered that Evelyn had said something to the same effect; but he had already discovered that Carroll possessed a keen insight in certain matters.

"And her sister?" he suggested.

"You won't mind my saying that I'm inclined to be sorry for her? She has learned repression — been driven into line. That girl has character, but it's being cramped and stunted. You live in walled-in compartments in this country."

"Doesn't the same thing apply to New York, Montreal, or Toronto?"

"Not to the same extent. We haven't had time yet

to number off all the little subdivisions and make rules for them, nor to elaborate the niceties of an immutable system. No doubt, we'll come to it."

He paused with a deprecatory laugh.

"Mrs. Chisholm believes in the system. She has been modeled on it — it's got into her blood; and that's why she's at variance with her daughters. No doubt, the thing's necessary; I'm finding no fault with it. You must remember that we're outsiders, with a different outlook; we've lived in the new West."

Vane strolled on along the terrace thoughtfully. He was not offended; he understood his companion's attitude. Like other men of education and good upbringing driven by unrest or disaster to the untrammeled life of the bush, Carroll had gained sympathy as well as knowledge. Facing facts candidly, he seldom indulged in decided protest against any of them. On the other hand, Vane was on occasion liable to outbreaks of indignation.

"Well," said Vane at length, "I guess it's time to go to bed."

## CHAPTER VI

### UPON THE HEIGHTS

VANE rose early the next morning, as he had been accustomed to do, and taking a towel he made his way across dewy meadows and between tall hedgerows to the tarn. Stripping where the rabbit-cropped sward met the mossy boulders, he swam out, joyously breasting the little ripples which splashed and sparkled beneath the breeze that had got up with the sun. Coming back, where the water lay in shadow beneath a larchwood which as yet had not wholly lost its vivid vernal green, he disturbed the paddling moor-hens and put up a mallard from a clump of swaying reeds. Then he dressed and turned homeward, glowing, beside a sluggish stream which wound through a waste of heather where the curlew were whistling eerily. He had no cares to trouble him, and it was delightful to feel that he had nothing to do except to enjoy himself in what he considered the fairest country in the world, at least in summer-time.

Scrambling over a limestone wall tufted thick with parsley fern, he noticed Mabel stooping over an object which lay among the heather where a rough cartroad approached a wooden bridge. On joining her he saw that she was examining a finely-built canoe with a hole in one bilge. She looked up at him ruefully.

"It's sad, isn't it? That stupid Little did it with his clumsy cart."

"I think it could be mended," Vane replied.

"Old Beavan — he's the wheelwright — said it couldn't; and Dad said I could hardly expect him to send the canoe back to Kingston. He bought it for me at an exhibition."

Then a thought seemed to strike her and her eyes grew eager.

"Perhaps you had something to do with light canoes in Canada?"

"Yes; I used to pole one loaded with provisions up a river and carry the lot round several falls. If I remember, I made eight shillings a day at it, and I think I earned it. You're fond of paddling?"

"I love it! I used to row the fishing-punt, but it's too old to be safe; and now that the canoe's smashed I can't go out at all."

"Well, we'll walk across and see what we can find in Beavan's shop."

He took a few measurements, making them on a stick, and they crossed the heath to a tiny hamlet nestling in a hollow of a limestone crag. There Vane made friends with the wheelwright, who regarded him dubiously at first, and obtained a piece of larch board from him. The grizzled North Countryman watched him closely as he set a plane, which is a delicate operation, and he raised no objections when Vane made use of his work-bench. When the board had been sawed up, Vane borrowed a few tools and copper nails, and he and Mabel went back to the canoe. On the way she glanced at him curiously.

"I wasn't sure old Beavan would let you have the things," she remarked. "It isn't often he'll even lend a hammer, but he seemed to take to you; I think it was the way you handled his plane."

"It's strange what little things win some people's good opinion, isn't it?"

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Mabel. "That's the way the Archdeacon talks. I thought you were different!"

The man acquiesced in the rebuke; and after an hour's labor at the canoe, he scraped the red lead he had used off his hands and sat down beside the craft. The sun was warm now, the dew was drying, and a lark sang riotously overhead. Vane became conscious that his companion was regarding him with what seemed to be approval.

"I really think you'll do, and we'll get on," she informed him. "If you had been the wrong kind, you would have worried about your red hands. Still, you could have rubbed them on the heather, instead of on your socks."

"I might have thought of that," Vane laughed. "But, you see, I've been accustomed to wearing old clothes. Anyway, you'll be able to launch the canoe as soon as the joint's dry."

"There's one thing I should have told you," the girl replied. "Dad would have sent the canoe away to be mended if it hadn't been so far. He's very good when things don't ruffle him; but he hasn't been fortunate lately. The lead mine takes a good deal of money."

Vane admired her loyalty, and he refrained from taking advantage of her candor, though there were

one or two questions he would have liked to ask. When he was last in England, Chisholm had been generally regarded as a man of means, though it was rumored that he was addicted to hazardous speculations. Mabel, without noticing his silence, went on:

"I heard Stevens — he's the gamekeeper — tell Beavan that Dad should have been a rabbit because he's so fond of burrowing. No doubt, that meant that he couldn't keep out of mines."

Vane made no comment; and Mabel, breaking off for a moment, looked up at the rugged fells to the west and then around at the moors which cut against the blue of the morning sky.

"It's all very pretty, but it shuts one in!" she cried. "You feel you want to get out and can't! I suppose you really couldn't take me back with you to Canada?"

"I'm afraid not. If you were about ten years older, it might be possible."

Mabel grimaced.

"Oh, don't! That's the kind of thing some of Gerald's smart friends say, and it makes one want to slap them! Besides," she added naively, glancing down at her curtailed skirt, "I'm by no means so young as I appear to be. The fact is, I'm not allowed to grow up yet."

"Why?"

The girl laughed at him.

"Oh, you've lived in the woods. If you had stayed in England, you would understand."

"I'm afraid I've been injudicious," Vane answered

with a show of humility. "But don't you think it's getting on toward breakfast time?"

"Breakfast won't be for a good while yet. We don't get up early. Evelyn used to, but it's different now. We used to go out on the tarn every morning, even in the wind and rain; but I suppose that's not good for one's complexion, though bothering about such things doesn't seem to me to be worth while. Aunt Julia couldn't do anything for Evelyn, though she had her in London for some time. Flora is our shining light."

"What did she do?"

"She married the Archdeacon; and he isn't so very dried up. I've seen him smile when I talked to him."

"I'm not astonished at that, Mabel," laughed Vane.

His companion looked up at him.

"My name's not Mabel — to you. I'm Mopsy to the family, but my special friends call me Mops. You're one of the few people one can be natural with, and I'm getting sick — you won't be shocked — of having to be the opposite. If you'll come along, I'll show you the setter puppies."

It was half an hour later when Vane, who had seldom had to wait so long for breakfast, sat down with an excellent appetite. The spacious room pleased him after the cramped quarters to which he had been accustomed. The sunlight that streamed in sparkled on choice old silver and glowed on freshly gathered flowers; and through the open windows mingled fragrances flowed in from the gardens. All that his gaze rested on spoke of ease and taste and leisure. Evelyn, sitting opposite him, looked won-

derfully fresh in her white dress; Mopsy was as amusing as she dared to be; but Vane felt drawn back to the restless world again as he glanced at his hostess and saw the wrinkles round her eyes and a hint of cleverly hidden strain in her expression. He fancied that a good deal could be deduced from the fragments of information her younger daughter had given him.

It was Mabel who suggested that they should picnic upon the summit of a lofty hill, from which there was a striking view; and as this met with the approval of Mrs. Chisholm, who excused herself from accompanying them, they set out an hour later. The day was bright, with glaring sunshine, and a moderate breeze drove up wisps of ragged cloud that dappled the hills with flitting shadow. Towering crag and shingly scree showed blue and purple through it and then flashed again into brilliancy, while the long, grassy slopes gleamed with silvery gray and ocher.

On leaving the head of the valley they climbed leisurely up easy slopes, slipping on the crisp hill grass now and then. By and by they plunged into tangled heather on a bolder ridge, rent by black gullies, down which at times wild torrents poured. This did not trouble either of the men, who were used to forcing a passage over more rugged hillsides and through leagues of matted brush, but Vane was surprised at the ease with which Evelyn threaded her way across the heath. She wore a short skirt and stout laced boots, and he noticed the supple grace of her movements and the delicate color the wind had brought into her face. It struck him that she had somehow changed since they had left the

valley. She seemed to have flung off something, and her laugh had a gay ring; but, while she smiled and chatted with him, he was still conscious of a subtle reserve in her manner.

Climbing still, they reached the haunts of the cloudberries and brushed through broad patches of the snowy blossoms that open their gleaming cups among the moss and heather. Vane gathered a handful and gave them to Evelyn.

"You should wear these. They grow only far up on the heights."

She flashed a swift glance at him, but she smiled as she drew the fragile stalks through her belt, and he felt that had it been permissible he could have elaborated the idea in his mind. They are stainless flowers, passionlessly white, that grow beyond the general reach of man, where the air is keen and pure; and, in spite of her graciousness, there was a coldness and a calm, which instead of repelling appealed to him strongly, about this girl. Mabel laughed mischievously.

"If you want to give me flowers, it had better be marsh-marigolds," she said. "They grow low down where it's slushy — but they blaze."

Carroll laughed.

"Mabel," he remarked a few moments later to Vane, "is unguarded in what she says, but she now and then shows signs of being considerably older than her years."

They left the black peat-soil behind them, and the heather gave place to thin and more fragile ling, beaded with its unopened buds, while fangs of rock cropped out here and there. Then turning the flank

of a steep ascent, they reached the foot of a shingly scree, and sat down to lunch in the warm sunshine where the wind was cut off by the peak above. Beneath them, a great rift opened up among the rocks, and far beyond the blue lake in the depths of it they could catch the silver gleam of the distant sea.

The fishing creel in which the provisions had been carried was promptly emptied; and when Mabel afterward took Carroll away to climb some neighboring crags, Vane lay resting on one elbow not far from Evelyn. She was looking down the long hollow, with the sunshine, which lighted a golden sparkle in her brown eyes, falling upon her face.

"You didn't seem to mind the climb."

"I enjoyed it," Evelyn declared, glancing at the cloudberry blossom in her belt. "I really am fond of the mountains, and I have to thank you for a day among them."

On the surface the words offered an opening for a complimentary rejoinder; but Vane was too shrewd to seize it. He had made one venture, and he surmised that a second one would not please her.

"They're almost at your door. One would imagine that you could indulge in a scramble among them whenever it pleased you."

"There are a good many things that look so close and still are out of reach," Evelyn answered with a smile that somehow troubled him. Then her manner changed. "You are content with this?"

Vane gazed about him. Purple crags lay in shadow; glistening threads of water fell among the rocks; and long slopes lay steeped in softest color under the cloud-flecked summer sky.

"Content is scarcely the right word for it," he assured her. "If it weren't so still and serene up here, I'd be riotously happy. There are reasons for this quite apart from the scenery; for one, it's remarkably pleasant to feel that I need do nothing but what I like during the next few months."

"The sensation must be unusual. I wonder if, even in your case, it will last so long?"

Vane laughed and stretched out one of his hands. It was lean and brown, and she could see the marks of old scars on the knuckles.

"In my case," he answered, "it has come only once in a lifetime, and, if it isn't too presumptuous, I think I've earned it." He indicated his battered fingers. "That's the result of holding a wet and slippery drill; and those aren't the only marks I carry about with me — though I've been more fortunate than many fine comrades."

Evelyn noticed something that pleased her in his voice as he concluded.

"I suppose one must get hurt now and then," she responded. "After all, a bruise that's only skin-deep doesn't trouble one long, and no doubt some scars are honorable. It's slow corrosion that's the deadliest."

She broke off with a laugh.

"Moralizing's out of place on a day like this," she added; "and such days are not frequent in the North. That's their greatest charm."

Vane nodded. He knew the sad gray skies of his native land, when its lonely heights are blurred by driving snow-cloud or scourged by bitter rain for weeks together, though now and then they tower

serenely into the blue heavens, steeped in ethereal splendor. Once more it struck him that in their latter aspect his companion resembled them. Made finely, of warm flesh and blood, she was yet ethereal too. There was something aloof and intangible about her that seemed in harmony with the hills among which she was born.

"Yes," he agreed. "On the face of it, the North is fickle; though to those who know it that's a misleading term. To some of us it's always the same, and its dark grimness makes one feel the radiance of its smile. For all that, I think we're going to see a sudden change in the weather."

Long wisps of leaden cloud began to stream across the crags above, intensifying, until it seemed unnatural, the glow of light and color on the rest.

"I wonder if Mopsy is leading Mr. Carroll into any mischief? They have been gone some time," said Evelyn. "She has a trick of getting herself and other people into difficulties. I suppose he is an old friend of yours, as you brought him over; unless, perhaps, he's acting as your secretary."

Vane's eyes twinkled.

"If he came in any particular capacity, it's as bear-leader. You see, there are a good many things I've forgotten in the bush, and, as I left this country young, there are no doubt some that I never learned."

"And so you make Mr. Carroll your confidential adviser. How did he gain the necessary experience?"

"That is more than I can tell you; but I'm inclined to believe he has been at one of the universities — Toronto, most likely. Anyhow, on the whole he acts as a judicious restraint."

"But don't you really know anything about him?"

"Only what some years of close companionship have taught me, though I think that's enough. For the rest, I took him on trust."

Evelyn looked surprised, and he spread out his hands in a humorous manner.

"A good many people have had to take me in that way, and they seemed willing to do so — the thing's not uncommon in the West. Why should I be more particular than they were?"

Just then Mabel and Carroll appeared. The latter's garments were stained in places, as if he had been scrambling over mossy rocks, and his pockets bulged. Mabel's skirt was torn, while a patch of white skin showed through her stocking.

"We've found some sun-dew and two ferns I don't know, as well as all sorts of other things," she announced.

"That's correct," vouched Carroll dryly; "I've got them. I guess they're going to fill up most of the creel."

Mabel superintended their transfer, and then addressed the others generally.

"I think we ought to go up the Pike now, when we have the chance. It isn't much of a climb from here; and we'll have rain before to-morrow. Besides, the quickest way back to the road is across the top and down the other side."

Evelyn agreed, and they set out, following a sheep path which skirted the screes, until they left the bank of sharp stones behind and faced a steep ascent. Parts of it necessitated a breathless scramble, and the sunlight faded from the hills as they climbed,

while thicker wisps of cloud drove across the ragged summit. They reached the top at length and stopped, bracing themselves against a rush of chilly breeze, while they looked down upon a wilderness of leaden-colored rock. Long trails of mist were creeping in and out among the crags, and here and there masses of it gathered round the higher slopes.

"I think the Pike's grandest in this weather," Mabel declared. "Look below, Mr. Carroll, and you'll see the mountain's like a starfish. It has prongs running out from it."

Carroll did as she directed him, and noticed three diverging ridges springing off from the shoulders of the peak. Their crests, which were narrow, led down toward the valley, but their sides fell in rent and fissured crags to great black hollows.

"You can get down two of them," Mabel went on. "The first is the nearest to the road, but the third's the easiest. It takes you to the Hause — that's the gap between it and the next big hill. You must be a climber to try the middle one."

A few big drops began to fall, and Evelyn cut her sister's explanations short.

"It strikes me that we'd better make a start at once," she said.

They set out, Mabel and Carroll leading, and drawing farther away from the two behind. The rain began in earnest as they descended. Rock slope and scattered stones were slippery, and Vane found it difficult to keep his footing on some of their lichened surfaces. He was relieved, however, to see that his companion seldom hesitated, and they made their way downward cautiously, until near the spot where the

three ridges diverged they walked into a belt of drifting mist. The peak above them was suddenly blotted out, and Evelyn bade Vane hail Carroll and Mabel, who had disappeared. He sent a shout ringing through the vapor, and caught a faint and unintelligible answer. A flock of sheep fled past and dislodged a rush of sliding stones. Vane heard the stones rattle far down the hillside, and when he called again a blast of chilly wind whirled his voice away. There was a faint echo above him and then silence.

"It looks as if they were out of hearing; and the slope ahead of us seems uncommonly steep by the way those stones went down. Do you think Mabel has taken Carroll down the Stanghyll ridge?"

"I can't tell," answered Evelyn. "It's comforting to remember that she knows it better than I do. I think we ought to make for the Hause; there's only one place that's really steep. Keep up to the left a little; the Scale Crags must be close beneath us."

They moved on circumspectly, skirting what seemed to be a pit of profound depth in which dim vapors whirled, while the rain, growing thicker, beat into their faces.

## CHAPTER VII

### STORM-STAYED

THE weather was not the only thing that troubled Vane as he stumbled on through the mist. Any unathletic tourist from the cities could have gone up without much difficulty by the way they had ascended, but it was different coming down on the opposite side of the mountain. There, their route led across banks of sharp-pointed stones that rested lightly on the steep slope, interspersed with outcropping rocks which were growing dangerously slippery, and a wilderness of crags pierced by three great radiating chasms lay beneath.

After half-an-hour's arduous scramble, he decided that they must be close upon the top of the last rift, and he stood still for a minute looking about him. The mist was now so thick that he could see scarcely thirty yards ahead, but the way it drove past him indicated that it was blowing up a hollow. On one hand a rampart of hillside loomed dimly out of it; in front there was a dark patch that looked like the face of a dripping rock; and between that and the hill a boggy stretch of grass ran back into the vapor. Vane glanced at his companion with some concern. Her skirt was heavy with moisture and the rain dripped from the brim of her hat, but she smiled at him reassuringly.

"It's not the first time I've got wet," she said cheeringly; "and you're not responsible — it's Mopsy's fault."

Vane felt relieved on one account. He had imagined that a woman hated to feel draggled and untidy, and he was willing to own that in his case fatigue usually tended toward shortness of temper. Though the scramble had scarcely taxed his powers, he fancied that Evelyn had already done as much as one could expect of her.

"I must prospect about a bit. Scardale's somewhere below us; but, if I remember, it's an awkward descent to the head of it; and I'm not sure of the right entrance to the Hause."

"I've only once been down this way, and that was a long while ago," Evelyn replied.

Vane left her and plodded away across the grass, sinking ankle-deep in the spongy moss among the roots of it. When he had grown scarcely distinguishable in the haze he turned and waved his hand.

"I know where we are — almost to the head of the beck!" he called.

Evelyn joined him at the edge of a trickle of water splashing in a peaty hollow, and they followed it down, seeing only odd strips of hillside amid the vapor. At length the ground grew softer, and Vane, going first, sank among the long green moss almost to his knees. It made a bubbling, sucking sound as he drew out his feet.

"That won't do! Stand still, please! I'll try a little to the right."

He tried in one or two directions; but wherever he went he sank over his boots. Coming back he in-

formed his companion that they would better go straight ahead.

"I know there's no bog worth speaking of — the Hause is a regular tourist track."

He stopped and stripped off his jacket.

"First of all, you must put this on; I'm sorry I didn't think of it before."

Evelyn demurred, and Vane rolled up the jacket.

"You have to choose between doing what I ask and watching me pitch it into the beck. I'm a rather determined person. It would be a pity to throw the thing away, particularly as the rain hasn't got through it yet."

She yielded, and he held the jacket while she put it on.

"There's another thing," he added. "I'm going to carry you for the next hundred yards, or possibly farther."

"No," replied Evelyn firmly. "On that point, my determination is as strong as yours."

Vane made a sign of acquiescence.

"You may have your way for a minute; I expect that will be long enough."

He was correct. Evelyn moved forward a pace or two, and then stopped with the skirt she had gathered up brushing the quivering emerald moss, and her boots, which were high ones, hidden in the mire. She had some difficulty in pulling them out. Then Vane coolly picked her up.

"All you have to do is to keep still for the next few minutes," he informed her in a most matter-of-fact voice.

Evelyn did not move, though she recognized that

had he shown any sign of self-conscious hesitation she would at once have shaken herself loose. As it was, the fact that he appeared perfectly at ease and unaware that he was doing anything unusual was reassuring. Then as he plodded forward she wondered at his steadiness, for she remembered that when she had once fallen heavily when nailing up a clematis her father, who was a vigorous man, had found it difficult to carry her upstairs. Vane had never carried any woman in his arms before, but he had occasionally had to pack — as it is termed in the West — hundred-and-forty-pound flour bags over a rocky portage, and, though the comparison did not strike him as a happy one, he thought the girl was not quite so heavy as that. He was conscious of a curious thrill and a certain stirring of his blood, but this, he decided, must be sternly ignored. His task was not an easy one, and he stumbled once or twice, but he accomplished it and set the girl down safely on firmer ground.

"Now," he said, "there's only the drop to the dale, but we must endeavor to keep out of the beck."

His voice and air were unembarrassed, though he was breathless, and Evelyn fancied that in this and the incident of the jacket he had at last revealed the forceful, natural manners of the West. It was the first glimpse she had had of them, and she was not displeased. The man had merely done what was most advisable, with practical sense.

A little farther on, a shoot of falling water swept out of the mist above and came splashing down a crag, spread out in frothing threads. It flowed across their path, reunited in a deep gully, and then fell

tumultuously into the beck, which was now ten or twelve feet below them. They clung to the rock as they traced it downward, stepping cautiously from ledge to ledge and from slippery stone to stone. At times a stone plunged into the mist beneath them, and Vane grasped the girl's arm and held out a steadying hand, but he was never fussy nor needlessly concerned. When she wanted help, it was offered at the right moment; but that was all. Had she been alarmed, her companion's manner would have been more comforting than persistent solicitude. He was, she decided, one who could be relied upon in an emergency.

"You are sure-footed," she remarked, when they stopped a minute or two for breath.

Vane laughed as he glanced into the vapor-filled depths beneath. They stood on a ledge two or three yards in width, with a tall crag behind them and the beck, which had rapidly grown larger, leaping half seen from rock to rock in the rift in front.

"I was born among these fells; and I have helped to pack various kinds of mining truck over much rougher mountains."

"Have you ever gone up as steep a place as this with a load?"

"If I remember rightly, the top of the Hause drops about three hundred feet, and we'll probably spend half an hour in reaching the valley. There was one western divide that it took us several days to cross, dragging a tent, camp gear and provisions in relays. Its foot was wrapped in tangled brush that tore most of our clothes to rags, and the last pitch was two thousand feet of rock where the snow lay waist-deep in the hollows."

"Two thousand feet! That dwarfs our little drop to the Hause. What were you doing so far up in the ranges?"

"Looking for a copper mine."

"And you found one?"

"No; not that time. As a rule, the mineral trail leads poor men to greater poverty, and sometimes to a grave; but once you have set your feet on it you follow it again. The thing becomes an obsession; you feel forced to go."

"Even if you bring nothing back?"

Vane laughed.

"One always brings back something — frost-bite, bruises, a bag of specimens that assayers and mineral development men smile at. They're the palpable results, but in most cases you pick up an intangible something else."

"And that is?"

"A thing beyond definition. A germ that lies in wait in the lonely places and breeds fantasies when it gets into your blood. Anyway, you can never quite get rid of it."

Evelyn was interested. The man was endowed with a trick of quaint and almost poetical imagination, which she had not suspected him of possessing.

"It conduces to unrest?" she suggested.

"Yes. One feels that there's a rich claim waiting beyond the thick timber through which one can hardly scramble, across the icy rivers, or over the snow-line."

"But you found one."

"At last I found it easily. After ranging the wildest solitudes, we struck it in a sheltered valley near the warm west coast. Curious, isn't it?"

"But didn't that banish the unrest and leave you satisfied?"

The man looked at her with a flicker of grim amusement in his eyes.

"As I explained, it can't be banished. There's always a richer claim somewhere that you haven't found. Our prospectors dream of it as the Mother Lode, and some spend half their lives in search of it; it was called El Dorado three hundred years ago. After all, the idea's a deeper thing than a miner's fantasy; in one shape or another it's inherent in optimistic human nature. Are you sure the microbe hasn't bitten you and Mopsy?"

He was too shrewd. Turning from him, she looked down at the eddying mist. For several years she had chafed at her surroundings and the restraints they laid upon her, with a restless longing for something wider and better: a freer, sunnier atmosphere where her nature could expand. At times she fancied there was only one sun which could warm it to a perfect growth, but that sun had not risen and scarcely seemed likely to do so.

Vane broke the silence deprecatingly.

"Now that you're rested, we'd better get on. I'm sorry I've kept you so long."

Though caution was still necessary, the rest of the descent was easier, and after a while they reached a winding dale. They followed it downward, splashing through water part of the time, and at length came into sight of a cluster of little houses standing between a river and a big fir wood.

"It must be getting on toward evening. Mopsy and Carroll probably went down the ridge, and as it

runs out lower down the valley, they'll be almost at home."

"It's six o'clock," replied Vane, glancing at his watch. "You can't walk home in the rain, and it's a long while since lunch. If Adam Bell and his wife are still at the Golden Fleece, we'll get something to eat there and borrow you some dry clothes. I've no doubt he'll drive us back afterward."

Evelyn made no objections. She was very wet and was beginning to feel weary, and they were some distance from home. She returned his jacket, and a few minutes later they entered an old hostelry which, like many others among those hills, was a farm as well as an inn. The landlady recognized Vane with pleased surprise. When she had attended to Evelyn she provided Vane with some of her husband's clothes. Then she lighted a fire; and when she had laid out a meal in the guest-room, Evelyn came in, attired in a dress of lilac print.

"It's Maggie Bell's," she explained demurely. "Her mother's things were rather large. Adam is away at a sheep auction, and they have only the trap he went in; but they expect him back in an hour or so."

"Then we must wait," smiled Vane. "Worse misfortunes have befallen me."

They made an excellent meal, and then Vane drew up a wicker chair to the fire for Evelyn and sat down opposite her. The room was low and shadowy, and partly paneled. Against one wall stood a black oak sideboard, with a plate-rack above it, and a great chest of the same material with ponderous hand-forged hinge-straps stood opposite it. A clock with an en-

graved metal dial and a six-foot case, polished to a wonderful luster by the hands of several generations, ticked in one corner; and here and there the firelight flickered upon utensils of burnished copper. There was little in the place that looked less than a century old, for there are nooks in the North that have still escaped the ravages of the collector. Outside, the rain dripped from the massy flagstone eaves, and the song of the river stole in monotonous cadence into the room.

Evelyn was silent and Vane said nothing for a while. He had been in the air all day, and though this was nothing new to him he was content to sit lazily still and leave the opening of conversation to his companion. In the meanwhile it was pleasant to glance toward her now and then. The pale-tinted dress became her, and he felt that the room would have looked less cheerful had she been away; though this by no means comprised the whole of his sensations. After living almost entirely among men, he had of late met three women who had impressed him in different ways, and they had all been pleasant to look upon.

First, there was Kitty Blake, little, graceful and, in a way, alluring; and it was she who had first roused in him a vague desire for a companion who could be more to him than a man could be. Beyond that, pretty as she was, she had only moved him to chivalrous pity and a wider sympathy.

Then he had met Jessy Horsfield, whom he admired. She was a clever woman and a handsome one, but she had scarcely stirred him at all.

Last, he had met Evelyn, as well endowed with

physical charm as either; and there was no doubt that the effect she had on him was different again. It was one that was difficult to analyze, though he lazily tried. She appealed to him by the grace of her carriage, the poise of her head, her delicate coloring, and the changing lights in her eyes; but behind these points there was something stronger and deeper expressed through them. He fancied that she possessed qualities he had not hitherto encountered, which would become more precious when they were fully understood. He thought of her as steadfast and wholesome in mind; one who sought for the best; but beyond this there was an ethereal something that could not be defined. Then a simile struck him: she was like the snow that towered high into the empyrean in British Columbia. In this, however, he was wrong, for there was warm human passion in the girl, though as yet it was sleeping.

He realized suddenly that he was getting absurdly sentimental, and instinctively he fumbled for his pipe, then stopped. Evelyn noticed this and smiled.

"You needn't hesitate. The Dene is redolent of cigars, and Gerald smokes everywhere when he is at home."

"Is he likely to turn up?" Vane asked. "It's ever so long since I've seen him."

"I'm afraid not. In fact, Gerald's rather under a cloud just now. I may as well tell you this, because you are sure to hear of it sooner or later. He has been extravagant and, so he assures us, extraordinarily unlucky."

"Stocks?" suggested Vane. He was acquainted with some of the family tendencies.

Evelyn hesitated a moment.

"That would more readily have been forgiven him. I believe he has speculated on the turf as well."

Vane was surprised. He understood that Gerald Chisholm was a barrister, and betting on the turf was not an amusement he would have associated with that profession.

"I must run up and see him by and by," he said thoughtfully.

Evelyn felt sorry she had spoken. Gerald needed help, which his father was not in a position to offer. Evelyn was not censorious of other people's faults, but it was impossible to be blind to some aspects of her brother's character, and she would have preferred that Vane should not meet Gerald while the latter was embarrassed by financial difficulties. She abruptly changed the subject.

"Several of the things you have told me about your life in Canada interest me. It must have been bracing to feel that you depended upon your own efforts and stood on your own feet, free from the hampering customs that are common here."

"The position has its disadvantages. You have no family influence behind you — nothing to fall back on. If you can't make good your footing, you must go down. It's curious that just before I came over here, a lady I met in Vancouver expressed an opinion very much like yours. She said it must be pleasant to feel that one is, to some extent at least, master of one's fate."

"Then she merely explained my meaning more clearly than I have done."

"One could have imagined that she had everything

she could reasonably wish for. If I'm not transgressing, so have you. It's strange you should both harbor the same idea."

Evelyn smiled.

"I don't think it's uncommon among young women nowadays. There's a grandeur in the thought that one's fate lies in the hands of the high unseen Powers; but to allow one's life to be molded by the prejudices and preconceptions of one's — neighbors is a different matter. Besides, if unrest and human striving were sent, was it only that they should be repressed?"

Vane sat silent a moment or two. He had noticed the brief pause and fancied that she had changed one of the words that followed it. He did not think that it was the opinions of her neighbors against which she chafed most.

"It's something that I've never experienced," he replied at length. "In a general way, I've done what I wanted."

"Which is a privilege that is denied us."

Evelyn spoke without bitterness.

"What do women who are left to their own resources do in western Canada?" she asked presently.

"Some of them marry; I suppose that's the most natural thing," answered Vane, with an air of reflection that amused her. "Anyway, they have plenty of opportunities. There's a preponderating number of unattached young men in the newly opened parts of the Dominion."

"Things are different here; or perhaps we require more than they do across the Atlantic. What becomes of the others?"

"They are waitresses in the hotels; they learn ste-

nography and typewriting, and go into offices and stores."

"And earn just enough to live upon meagerly? If their wages are high, they must pay out more. That follows, doesn't it?"

"To some extent."

"Is there nothing better open to them?"

"No; not unless they're trained for it and become specialized. That implies peculiar abilities and a systematic education with one end in view. You can't enter the arena to fight for the higher prizes unless you're properly armed. The easiest way for a woman to acquire power and influence is by a judicious marriage. No doubt, it's the same here."

"It is," laughed Evelyn. "A man is more fortunately situated."

"Probably; but if he's poor, he's rather walled in, too. He breaks through now and then; and in the newer countries he gets an opportunity."

Vane abstractedly examined his pipe, which he had not lighted yet. It was clear that the girl was dissatisfied with her surroundings, and had for some reason temporarily relaxed the restraint she generally laid upon herself; but he felt that, if she were wise, she would force herself to be content. She was of too fine a fiber to plunge into the struggle that many women had to wage. Though he did not doubt her courage, she had not been trained for it. He had noticed that among men it was the cruder and less developed organizations that proved hardiest in adverse situations; one needed a strain of primitive vigor. There was, it seemed, only one means of release for Evelyn, and that was a happy marriage. But a mar-

riage could not be happy unless the suitor should be all that she desired; and Evelyn would be fastidious, though her family would, no doubt, look only for wealth and station. Vane imagined that this was where the trouble lay, and he felt a protective pity for her. He would wait and keep his eyes open.

Presently there was a rattle of wheels outside and the landlord came in and greeted them with rude cordiality. Shortly afterward Vane helped Evelyn into the rig, and Bell drove them home through the rain.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LUCY VANE

BRIGHT sunshine streamed down out of a cloudless sky one afternoon shortly after the ascent of the Pike. Vane stood talking with his sister upon the terrace in front of the Dene. He leaned against the low wall, frowning, for Lucy hitherto had avoided a discussion of the subject which occupied their attention, and now, as he would have said, he could not make her listen to reason.

She stood in front of him, with the point of her parasol pressed firmly into the gravel and her lips set, though in her eyes there was a smile which suggested forbearance. Lucy was tall and spare of figure; a year younger than her brother; and of somewhat determined and essentially practical character. She earned her living in a northern manufacturing town by lecturing on domestic economy, for the public authorities. Vane understood that she also received a small stipend as secretary to some women's organization and that she took a part in suffrage propaganda. She had a thin, forceful face, seldom characterized by repose.

"After all," Vane broke out, "what I'm urging is a very natural thing. I don't like to think of your being forced to work as you are doing, and I've tried to show you that it wouldn't cost me any self-denial to make you an allowance. There's no reason why

you should be at the beck and call of those committees any longer."

Lucy's smile grew plainer.

"I don't think that quite describes my position."

"It's possible," Vane agreed with a trace of dryness. "No doubt, you insist that the chairman or lady president give way to you; but this doesn't affect the question. You have to work, anyway."

"But I like it; and it keeps me in some degree of comfort."

The man turned impatiently and glanced about him. The front of the old gray house was flooded with light, and the mossy sward below the terrace glowed luminously green. The shadows of the hollies and cypresses were thin and unsubstantial, but where a beech overarched the grass, Evelyn and Mrs. Chisholm, attired in light draperies, reclined in basket chairs. Carroll, in thin gray tweed, stood near them, talking to Mabel, and Chisholm sat on a bench with a newspaper in his hand. He looked half asleep, and a languorous stillness pervaded the whole scene. Beyond it, the tarn shone dazzlingly, and in the distance ranks of rugged fells towered, dim and faintly blue. All that the eye rested on spoke of an unbroken tranquillity.

"Wouldn't you like this kind of thing, as well?" Vane asked. "Of course, I mean what it implies — the power to take life easy and get as much enjoyment as possible out of it. It wouldn't be difficult, if you'd only take what I'd be glad to give you." He indicated the languid figures in the foreground. "You could, for instance, spend your time among people of this sort. After all, it's what you were meant to do."

"Would that appeal to you?"

"Oh, I like it in the meantime," he evaded.

"Well," Lucy returned curtly, "I believe I'm more at home with the other kind of people — those in poverty, squalor and ignorance. I've an idea that they have a stronger claim on me; but that's not a point I can urge. The fact is, I've chosen my career, and there are practical reasons why I shouldn't abandon it. I had a good deal of trouble in getting a footing, and if I fell out now, it would be harder still to take my place in the ranks again."

"But you wouldn't require to do so."

"I can't be sure. I don't want to hurt you; but, after all, your success was sudden, and one understands that it isn't wise to depend on an income derived from mining properties."

Vane frowned.

"None of you ever did believe in me!"

"I suppose there's some truth in that. You really did give us trouble, you know. Somehow, you were different — you wouldn't fit in; though I believe the same thing applied to me, for that matter."

"And now you don't expect my prosperity to last?"

The girl hesitated, but she was candid by nature.

"Perhaps I'd better answer. You have it in you to work determinedly and, when it's necessary, to do things that men with less courage would shrink from; but I'm doubtful whether yours is the temperament that leads to success. You haven't the huckster's instincts; you're not cold-blooded enough; you wouldn't cajole your friends nor truckle to your enemies."

"If I adopted the latter course, it would certainly be against the grain," Vane confessed.

Lucy laughed.

"Well, I mean to go on earning my living; but you may take me up to London for a few days, if you want to, and buy me some hats and things. Then I don't mind your giving something to the Emancipation Society."

"I am not sure that I believe in emancipation; but you may have ten guineas."

"Thank you."

Lucy glanced around toward Carroll, who was approaching them with Mabel.

"I'll give you a piece of advice," she added. "Stick to that man. He's cooler and less headstrong than you are; he'll prove a useful friend."

"What are you two talking about?" asked Carroll. "You look animated."

"Wallace has just promised me ten guineas to assist the movement for the emancipation of women," Lucy answered pointedly. "Our society's efforts are sadly restricted by the lack of funds."

"Vane is now and then a little inconsequential in his generosity," Carroll rejoined. "I didn't know he was interested in that kind of thing; but as I don't like to be outdone by my partner, I'll subscribe the same. By the way, why do you people reckon these things in guineas?"

"Thanks," smiled Lucy, making an entry in a notebook in a businesslike manner. "As you said it was a subscription, you'll hear from us next year. In answer to your question, it's an ancient custom, and it has the advantage that you get in the extra shillings."

They strolled along the terrace together, and as

they went down the steps to the lawn Carroll turned to her with a smile.

"Have you tackled Chisholm yet?"

"I never waste powder and shot," Lucy replied tersely. "A man of his restricted views would sooner subscribe handsomely to a movement to put us down."

"Are you regretting the ten guineas, Vane?" Carroll questioned laughingly. "You don't look pleased."

"The fact is, I wanted to do something that wasn't allowed. I've met with the same disillusionment here as I did in British Columbia."

Lucy looked up at her brother.

"Did you attempt to give somebody money there?"

"I did. It's not worth discussing; and, anyway, she wouldn't listen to me."

They strolled on, Vane frowning, while Carroll, noticing signs of suppressed interest in Lucy's face, smiled unobserved. Neither he nor the others thought of Mabel, who was following them.

Some time after they joined the others, Carroll lay back in a deep chair, with his half-closed eyes turned in Lucy's direction.

"Are you asleep, or thinking hard?" Mrs. Chisholm asked him.

"Not more than half asleep," he laughed. "I was trying to remember *A Dream of Fair Women.* It's a suitable occupation for a drowsy summer afternoon in a place like this, but I must confess that it was Miss Vane who put it into my head. She reminded me of one or two of the heroines when she was championing the cause of the suffragist."

"You mustn't imagine that Englishwomen in gen-

eral sympathize with her, or that such ideas are popular at the Dene."

Carroll smiled reassuringly.

"I shouldn't have imagined the latter for a moment. But, as I said, on an afternoon of this kind one may be excused for indulging in romantic fancies. Don't you see what brought those old-time heroines into my mind? I mean the elusive resemblance to their latter-day prototype?"

Mrs. Chisholm looked puzzled.

"No," she declared. "One of them was Greek, another early English, and the finest of all was the Hebrew maid. As they couldn't have been like one another, how could they, collectively, have borne a resemblance to anybody else?"

"That's logical, on the surface. To digress, why do you most admire Jephthah's daughter, the gentle Gileadite?"

His hostess affected surprise.

"Isn't it evident, when one remembers her patient sacrifice; her fine sense of family honor?"

Carroll felt that this was much the kind of sentiment one could have expected from her; and he did her the justice to believe that it was genuine and that she was capable of living up to her convictions. His glance rested on Vane for a moment, and the latter was startled as he guessed Carroll's thought.

Evelyn sat near him, reclining languidly in a wicker chair. She had been silent, and now that her face was in repose the signs of reserve and repression were plainer than ever. There was, however, pride in it, and Vane felt that she was endowed with a keener and finer sense of family honor than her thin-lipped

mother. Her brother's career was threatened by the results of his own imprudence, and though her father could hardly be compared with the Gileadite warrior, there was, Vane fancied, a disturbing similarity between the two cases. It was unpleasant to contemplate the possibility of this girl's being called upon to bear the cost of her relatives' misfortunes or follies.

Carroll looked across at Lucy with a smile.

"You won't agree with Mrs. Chisholm?" he suggested.

"No," answered Lucy firmly. "Leaving out the instance in question, there are too many people who transgress and then expect somebody else — a woman, generally — to serve as a sacrifice."

"I don't agree, either," Mabel broke in. "I'd sooner have been Cleopatra, or Joan of Arc — only she was burned, poor thing."

"That was only what she might have expected. An unpleasant fate generally overtakes people who go about disturbing things," Mrs. Chisholm said severely.

The speech was characteristic, and the others smiled. It would have astonished them had Mrs. Chisholm sympathized with the rebel idealist whose beckoning visions led to the clash of arms.

"Aren't you getting off the track," Vane asked Carroll. "I don't see the drift of your previous remarks."

"Well," drawled Carroll, "there must be, I think, a certain distinctive stamp upon those who belong to the leader type — I mean the people who are capable of doing striking and heroic things. Apart from this, I've been studying you English — I've been over here before — and it has struck me that there's occasionally

something imperious, or rather imperial, in the faces of your women in the most northern counties. I can't define the thing, but it's there — in the line of nose, in the mouth, and, I think, most marked in the brows. It's not Saxon, nor Norse, nor Danish; I'd sooner call it Roman."

Vane was slightly astonished. He had seen that look in Evelyn's face, and now, for the first time, he recognized it in his sister's.

"Perhaps you have hit it," he said with a laugh. "You can reach the Wall from here in a day's ride."

"The Wall?"

"The Roman Wall; Hadrian's Wall. I believe one authority states that they had a garrison of one hundred thousand men to keep it."

Chisholm joined the group. He was a tall, rather florid-faced man, with a formal manner, and was dressed immaculately in creaseless clothes.

"The point Wallace raises is interesting," he remarked. "While I don't know how long it takes for a strain to die out, there must have been a large civil population living near the Wall, and we know that the characteristics of the Teutonic peoples who followed the Romans still remain. On the other hand, some of the followers were vexillaries, from the bounds of the Empire; Gauls, for example, or Iberians."

When, later on, the group broke up, Evelyn was left alone for a few minutes with Mabel.

"Gerald should have been sent to Canada instead of to Oxford," the younger girl declared. "Then he might have got as rich as Wallace Vane and Mr. Carroll."

"What makes you think they're rich?" Evelyn asked with reproof in her tone.

Mabel grimaced.

"Oh, we all knew they were rich before they came. They were giving Lucy guineas for the suffragists an hour ago. They must have a good deal of money to waste it like that. Besides, I think Wallace wanted her to take some more; and he seemed quite vexed when he said he'd tried to give money to somebody else in Canada who wouldn't have it. As he said 'she,' it must have been a woman, but I don't think he meant to mention that. It slipped out."

"You had no right to listen," Evelyn retorted severely; but the information sank into her mind, and she afterward remembered it.

She rose when the sunshine, creeping farther across the grass, fell upon her, and Vane carried her chair, as well as those of the others, who were strolling back toward them, into the shadow. This she thought was typical of the man. He seemed happiest when he was doing something. By and by a chance remark of her mother's once more set Carroll to discoursing humorously.

"After all," he contended, "it's difficult to obey a purely arbitrary rule of conduct. Several of the philosophers seem to have decided that the origin of virtue is utility."

"Utility?" Chisholm queried.

"Yes; utility to one's neighbors or the community at large. For instance, I desire an apple growing on somebody else's tree — one of the big red apples that hang over the roadside in Ontario. Now the longing for the fruit is natural, and innocent in itself; the

trouble is that if it were indulged in and gratified by every person who passed along the road, the farmer would abandon the cultivation of his orchard. He would neither plant nor prune his trees, except for the expectation of enjoying what they yield. The offense, accordingly, concerns everybody who enjoys apples."

Mrs. Chisholm smiled assent.

"I believe that idea is the basis of our minor social and domestic codes. Even when they're illogical in particular cases, they're necessary in general."

Evelyn looked across at Vane, as if to invite his opinion, and he knit his brows.

"I don't think Carroll's correct. The traditional view, which, as I understand it, is that the sense of right is innate, ingrained in man's nature, seems more reasonable. I'll give you two instances. There was a man in charge of a little mine. He had had the crudest education, and no moral training, but he was an excellent miner. Well, he was given a hint that it was not desirable the mine should turn out much paying ore."

"But why wasn't it required to produce as much as possible?" Evelyn asked.

"I believe that somebody wanted to break down the value of the shares and afterward quietly buy them up. Anyway, though he knew it would result in his dismissal, the man I mentioned drove the boys his hardest. He worked savagely, taking risks he could have avoided by spending a little more time in precautions, in a badly timbered tunnel. He didn't reason — he was hardly capable of it — but he got the most out of the mine."

"It was fine of him!" Evelyn exclaimed.

"The engineer of a collier figures in the next case," Vane went on. "The engines were clumsy and badly finished, but the man spent his care and labor on them until I think he loved them. His only trouble was that he was sent to sea with second-rate oils and stores. After a while they grew so bad that he could hardly use them; and he had reasons for believing that a person who could dismiss or promote him was getting a big commission on the goods. He was a plain, unreasoning man; but he would not cripple his engines; and at last he condemned the stores and made the skipper purchase supplies he could use, at double the usual prices, in a foreign port. There could be only one result; he was driving a pump in a mine when I last met him."

He paused, and added quietly:

"It wasn't logic, it wasn't even conventional morality, that impelled these men. It was something that was part of them. What's more, men of their type are more common than the cynics believe."

Carroll smiled good-humoredly; and when the party sauntered toward the house, he walked beside Evelyn.

"There's one point that Wallace omitted to mention in connection with his tales," he remarked. "The things he narrated are precisely those which, on being given the opportunity, he would have pleasure in doing himself."

"Why pleasure? I could understand his doing them, but I'd expect him to feel some reluctance."

Carroll's eyes twinkled.

"He gets indignant now and then. Virtuous people are generally content to resist temptation, but Wallace

is apt to attack the tempter. I dare say it isn't wise, but that's the kind of man he is."

"Ah! One couldn't find fault with the type. But I wonder why you have taken the trouble to tell me this?"

"Really, I don't know. Somehow, I have an impression that I ought to say what I can in Wallace's favor, if only because he brought me here, and I feel like talking when I can get a sympathetic listener."

"I shouldn't have imagined the latter was indispensable," laughed Evelyn. "Is this visit all you owe Wallace?"

"No, indeed. In many ways, I owe him a good deal more. He has no idea of this, but it doesn't lessen my obligation. By the way, it struck me that in many respects Miss Vane is rather like her brother."

"Lucy is opinionative, and now and then embarrassingly candid, but she leads a life that most of us would shrink from. It isn't necessary that she should do so — family friends would have arranged things differently — and the tasks she's paid for are less than half her labors. I believe she generally gets abuse as a reward for the rest."

Then Mabel joined them and took possession of Carroll, and Evelyn strolled on alone, thinking of what he had told her.

## CHAPTER IX

### CHISHOLM PROVES AMENABLE

VANE spent a month at the Dene, with quiet satisfaction, and when at last he left for London and Paris he gladly promised to come back for another few weeks before he sailed for Canada. He stayed some time in Paris, because Carroll insisted on it, but it was with eagerness that he went north again late in the autumn. For one reason — and he laid some stress upon this — he longed for the moorland air and the rugged fells, though he admitted that Evelyn's society enhanced their charm for him.

At last, shortly before he set out on the journey, he took himself to task and endeavored to determine precisely the nature of his feelings toward her; but he signally failed to elucidate the point. It was clear only that he was more contented in her presence, and that, apart from her physical comeliness, she had a stimulating effect upon his mental faculties. Then he wondered how she regarded him; and to this question he could find no answer. She had treated him with a quiet friendliness, and had to some extent taken him into her confidence. For the most part, however, there was a reserve about her that he found more piquant than deterrent, and he was conscious that, while willing to talk with him freely, she was still holding him off at arm's length.

On the whole, he could not be absolutely sure that he desired to get much nearer. Though he failed to recognize this clearly, his attitude was largely one of respectful admiration, tinged with a vein of compassion. Evelyn was unhappy, and out of harmony with her relatives; and he could understand this more readily because their ideas occasionally jarred on him.

One morning, about a fortnight after they returned to the Dene, Vane and Carroll walked out of the hamlet where the wheelwright's shop was. Sitting down on the wall of a bridge, Vane opened the telegram in his hand.

"I think you have Nairn's code in your wallet," he said. "We'll decipher the thing."

Carroll laid the message on a smooth stone and set to work with a pencil.

"*Situation highly satisfactory.*"

He broke off, to chuckle a comment.

"It must be, if Nairn paid for an extra word — highly's not in the code."

Then he went on with the deciphering:

"*Result of reduction exceeds anticipations. Stock thirty premium. Your presence not immediately required.*"

"That's distinctly encouraging," declared Vane. "Now that they are getting farther in, the ore must be carrying more silver."

"It strikes me as fortunate. I ran through the bank account last night, and there's no doubt that you have spent a good deal of money. It confirms my opinion that you have mighty expensive friends."

Vane frowned, but Carroll continued undeterred.

"You want pulling up, after the way you have been indulging in a reckless extravagance which, I feel compelled to point out, is new to you. The check drawn in favor of Gerald Chisholm rather astonished me. Have you said anything about it to his relatives?"

"I haven't."

"Then, judging by the little I saw of him, I should consider it most unlikely that he has made any allusion to the matter. The next check was even more surprising — I mean the one you gave his father."

"They were both loans. Chisholm offered me security."

"Unsalable stock, or a mortgage on property that carries another charge! Have you any idea of getting the money back?"

"What has that to do with you?"

Carroll spread out his hands.

"Only this: It strikes me that you need looking after. We can't stay here indefinitely. Hadn't you better get back to Vancouver before your English friends ruin you?"

"I'll go in three or four weeks; not before."

Carroll sat silent a minute or two, and then looked his companion squarely in the face.

"Is it your intention to marry Evelyn Chisholm?"

"I don't know what has put that into your mind."

"I should be a good deal astonished if it hadn't suggested itself to her family," Carroll retorted.

Vane looked thoughtful.

"I'm far from sure that it's an idea they would entertain with any great favor. For one thing, I can't live here."

Carroll laughed.

"Try them, and see. Show them Nairn's telegram when you mention the matter."

Vane swung himself down from the wall. During the past two weeks he had seen a good deal of Evelyn, and his regard for her had rapidly grown stronger. Now that news that his affairs were prospering had reached him, he suddenly made up his mind.

"It's very possible that I may do so," he informed his comrade. "We'll get along."

His heart beat a little more rapidly than usual as they turned back toward the house, but he was perfectly composed when some time later he sat down beside Chisholm, who was lounging away the morning on the lawn.

"I've been across to the village for a telegram I expected," he said, handing Chisholm the deciphered message. "It occurred to me that you might be interested. The news is encouraging."

Chisholm read it with inward satisfaction. When he laid it down he had determined on the line he meant to follow.

"You're a fortunate man. There's probably no reasonable wish that you can't gratify."

"There are things one can't buy with money," Vane replied.

"That is very true. They're often the most valuable. On the other hand, some of them may now and then be had for the asking. Besides, when one has a sanguine temperament and a determination, it's difficult to believe that anything one sets one's heart on is quite unattainable."

Vane wondered whether he had been given a hint. Chisholm's manner was suggestive, and Carroll's re-

marks had had an effect on him. He sat silent, and Chisholm continued:

"If I were in your place, I should feel that I had all that I could desire within my reach."

Vane was becoming sure that his comrade had been right. Chisholm would not have harped on the same idea unless he had intended to convey some particular meaning; but the man's methods roused Vane's dislike. He could face opposition, and he would rather have been discouraged than judiciously prompted.

"Then if I offered myself as a suitor for Evelyn, you would not think me presumptuous?"

Chisholm was somewhat astonished at his abruptness, but he smiled reassuringly.

"No; I can't see why I should do so. You are in a position to maintain a wife in comfort, and I don't think anybody could take exception to your character." He paused a moment. "I suppose you have some idea of how Evelyn regards you?"

"Not the faintest. That's the trouble."

"Would you like Mrs. Chisholm or myself to mention the matter?"

"No," answered Vane decidedly. "In fact, I must ask you not to do anything of the kind. I only wished to make sure of your good will, and now that I'm satisfied on that point, I'd rather wait and speak — when it seems judicious."

Chisholm nodded.

"I dare say that would be wisest. There is nothing to be gained by being precipitate."

Vane thanked him, and waited. He fancied that the transaction — that seemed the best name for it — was

not completed yet; but he meant to leave the matter to his companion; he would not help the man.

"There's something that had better be mentioned now, distasteful as it is," Chisholm said at length. "I can settle nothing upon Evelyn. As you must have guessed, my affairs are in a far from promising state. Indeed, I'm afraid I may have to ask your indulgence when the loan falls due; and I don't mind confessing that the prospect of Evelyn's making what I think is a suitable marriage is a relief to me."

Vane's feelings were somewhat mixed, but contempt figured prominently among them. He could find no fault with Chisholm's desire to safeguard his daughter's future, but he was convinced that the man looked for more than this. He felt that he had been favored with a delicate hint to which his companion expected an answer. He was sorry for Evelyn, and was ashamed of the position he was forced to take.

"Well," he replied curtly, "you need not be concerned about the loan; I'm not likely to prove a pressing creditor. To go a little farther, I should naturally take an interest in the welfare of my wife's relatives. I don't think I can say anything more in the meanwhile."

When he saw Chisholm's smile, he felt that he might have spoken more plainly without offense; but the elder man looked satisfied.

"Those are the views I expected you to hold," he declared. "I believe that Mrs. Chisholm will share my gratification if you find Evelyn disposed to listen to you."

Vane left him shortly afterward with a sense of shame. He felt that he had bought the girl, and that,

if she ever heard of it, she would find it hard to forgive him for the course he had taken. When he met Carroll he was frowning.

"I've had a talk with Chisholm," he said. "It has upset my temper — I feel mean! There's no doubt that you were right."

Carroll's smile showed that he could guess what was in his comrade's mind.

"I shouldn't worry too much about the thing. The girl probably understands the situation. It's not altogether pleasant, but I dare say she's more or less resigned to it. She can't help herself."

Vane gazed at him with anger.

"Does that make it any better? Is it any comfort to me?"

"Take her out of it. If she has any liking for you, she'll thank you for doing so."

Vane strode away, and nobody saw him again for an hour or two. In the afternoon, however, at Mrs. Chisholm's suggestion, he and Carroll set out with the girls for a hill beyond the tarn.

It was a perfect day of late autumn. A pale golden haze softened the rugged outlines of crag and fell, which towered in purple masses against a sky of stainless azure. Warm sunshine flooded the valley, glowing on the gold and crimson that flecked the lower beech sprays and turning the leaves of the brambles to points of ruby flame. Here and there white limestone ridges flung back the light, and the tarn gleamed like molten silver when a faint puff of wind traced a dark blue smear athwart its surface. The winding road was thick with dust, and a deep stillness brooded over everything.

By and by, however, a couple of whip-cracks rose from beyond a dip of the road and were followed by a shout in a woman's voice and a sharp clatter of iron on stone.

"Oh!" cried Mabel, when they reached the brow of the descent, "the poor thing can't get up! What a shame to give it such a load!"

The road fell sharply between ragged hedgerows, and near the foot of the hill a pony was struggling vainly to move a cart. The vehicle was heavily loaded, and while the animal strained and floundered, a woman struck it with a whip.

"It's Mrs. Hoggarth; her husband's the carrier," Mabel explained. "Come on! We must stop her! She mustn't beat the pony like that!"

Vane strode down the hill, and when they approached the cart Mabel called indignantly to the woman.

"Stop! You oughtn't to do that! The load's too heavy! Where's Hoggarth?"

Vane seized one rein close up to the bit and turned the pony until the cart was across the road. When he had done so, the woman looked around at Mabel.

"Wheel went over his foot last night. He canna get on his boot. I'm none fond of beating pony, but bank's steep and we mun gan up. The folks mun have their things."

Vane glanced at the pony, which stood with lowered head and heaving flank. It was evident that the animal could do no more.

"There's only one way out of the trouble," he said. "We must pack some of this truck to the top. What's in those bags?"

"One's oats," answered the woman. "It's four bushel. Other one's linseed cake. Those slates for Bell's new stable are the heaviest."

Carroll came up with Evelyn just then, and Vane spoke to him.

"Come here and help me with this bag!"

They had it ready at the back of the cart in a few moments, and Evelyn, who knew that a four-bushel bag of oats is difficult to move, was astonished at the ease with which they handled it. Vane got the bag upon his back and walked up the hill with it. The veins stood out on his forehead and his face grew red, but he plodded steadily on and came back for another load.

"I'll take an armful of the slates this time, Carroll. You can tackle the cake."

The cake was heavy, though the bag was not full, and when they returned, Carroll was breathing hard and there were smears of blood on one of Vane's hands. The old woman gazed at him in amazed admiration.

"Thank you, sir," she said. "There's not many men wad carry four bushel up a bank like that."

Vane laughed.

"I'm used to it. Now I think that we can face the hill."

He seized the rein, and after a flounder or two the pony started the load and struggled up the ascent. Leaving the woman at the top, voluble with thanks, Vane came down and sauntered on again with Mabel.

"I made sure you would drop that bag until I saw how you got hold of it, and then I knew you would

manage," she informed him. "You see, I've watched the men at Scarside mill. I didn't want you to drop it."

"I wonder why?" laughed Vane.

"If you do, you must be stupid. We're friends, aren't we? I like my friends to be able to do anything that other folks can. That's partly why I took to you."

Vane made her a ceremonious bow and they went on, chatting lightly. When they came to a sweep of climbing moor, they changed companions, for Mabel led Carroll off in search of plants and ferns. Farther on, Evelyn sat down upon a heathy bank, and Vane found a place on a stone beside a trickling rill.

"It's pleasant here, and I like the sun," she explained. "Besides, it's still a good way to the top, and I generally feel discontented when I get there. There are other peaks much higher — one wants to go on."

Vane smiled in comprehension.

"Yes," he agreed. "On and always on! It's the feeling that drives the prospector. We seem to have the same thoughts on a good many points."

Evelyn did not answer this.

"I was glad you got that cart up the hill. What made you think of it?"

"The pony was played out, though it was a plucky beast. I suppose I felt sorry for it. I've been driven hard myself."

The girl's eyes softened. She had seen him use his strength, though it was, she imagined, the strength of determined will and disciplined body rather than bulk of muscle, for the man was hard and lean.

The strength also was associated with a gentleness and a sympathy with the lower creation that appealed to her.

"How hard were you driven?" she asked.

"Sometimes, until I could scarcely crawl back to my tent or the sleeping-shack at night. Out yonder, construction bosses and contractors' foremen are skilled in getting the utmost value of every dollar out of a man. I've had my hands worn to raw wounds and half my knuckles bruised until it was almost impossible to bend them."

"Were you compelled to work like that?"

"I thought so. It seemed to be the custom of the country; one had to get used to it."

Evelyn hesitated a moment; though she was interested.

"But was there nothing easier? Had you no money?"

"Very little, as a rule; and what I had I tried to keep. It was to give me a start in life. It was hard to resist the temptation to use some of it now and then, but I held out." He laughed grimly. "After all, I suppose it was excellent discipline."

The girl made a sign of comprehending sympathy. There was a romance in the man's career which had its effect on her, and she could recognize the strength of will which had held him to the laborious tasks he might have shirked while the money lasted. Then a stain on the sleeve of his jacket caught her eye.

"You have hurt your hand!" she exclaimed.

Vane glanced down at his hand, which was reddened all over.

"It looks like it; those slates must have cut it."

"Hadn't you better wash it and tie it up? It seems a nasty cut."

He dipped his hand into the rill, and was fumbling awkwardly with his handkerchief when she stopped him.

"That won't do! Let me fix it for you."

Rolling up her own handkerchief, she wet it and laid it on his palm, across which a red gash ran. He had moved close to her, stooping down, and a disturbing thrill ran through him as she held his hand. Once more, however, he was troubled by a sense of compunction as he recalled his interview with Chisholm.

"Thank you," he said abruptly when she finished.

There were signs of tension in his face, and she drew a little away from him when he sat down again. For a few moments he struggled with himself. They were alone; he had her father's consent; and he knew that what he had done half an hour ago had appealed to her. But he felt that he could not plead his cause just then. With her parents on his side, she was at a disadvantage; and he shrank from the thought that she might be forced upon him against her will. This was not what he desired; and she might hate him for it afterward. She was very alluring, there had been signs of an unusual gentleness in her manner, and the light touch of her cool fingers had stirred his blood; but he wanted time to win her favor, aided only by such gifts as he had been endowed with. It cost him a determined effort, but he made up his mind to wait; and it was a relief to him when the approach of Mabel and Carroll rendered any confidential conversation out of the question.

## CHAPTER X

### WITH THE OTTER HOUNDS

A WEEK or two had slipped away since Vane cut his hand. He lounged one morning upon the terrace, chatting with Carroll. It was a heavy, black morning; the hills were hidden by wrappings of leaden mist, and the still air was charged with moisture.

Suddenly a long, faint howl came up the valley and was answered by another in a deeper note. Then a confused swelling clamor broke out, softened by the distance, and slightly resembling the sound of chiming bells. Carroll stopped and listened.

"What in the name of wonder is that?" he asked. "The first of it reminded me of a coyote howling, but the rest's more like the noise the timber wolves make in the bush at night."

"You haven't made a bad shot," Vane laughed. "It's a pack of otter hounds hot upon the scent."

The sound ceased as suddenly as it had begun; and a few moments later Mabel came running toward the men.

"I knew the hounds met at Patten Brig, but Jim was sure they'd go down-stream!" she cried breathlessly. "They're coming up! I think they're at the pool below the village! Get two poles — you'll find some in the tool-shed — and come along at once!"

She climbed into the house through a window, calling for Evelyn, and Carroll smiled.

"We have our orders. I suppose we'd better go."

"It's one of the popular sports up here," Vane replied. "You may as well see it."

They set out a few minutes later, accompanied by Evelyn, while Mabel hurried on in front and reproached them for their tardiness. Sometimes they heard the hounds, sometimes a hoarse shouting that traveled far through the still air, and then sometimes there was only the tremulous song of running water. At length, after crossing several wet fields, they came to a rushy meadow on the edge of the river, which spread out into a wide pool, fringed with alders which had not yet lost their leaves and the barer withes of osiers. There was a swift stream at the head of it, and a long rippling shallow at the tail; and scattered along the bank and in the water was a curiously mixed company.

A red-coated man with whip and horn stood in the tail outflow, and three or four more with poles in their hands were spread out across the stream behind him. These, and one or two in the head stream, appeared by their dress to belong to the hunt; but the rest, among whom were a few women, were attired in every-day garments and were of different walks in life: artisans, laborers, people of leisure, and a late tourist or two.

Three or four big hounds were swimming aimlessly up and down the pool; a dozen more trotted to and fro along the water's edge, stopping to sniff and give tongue in an uncertain manner now and then; but there was no sign of an otter.

Carroll looked round with a smile when his companions stopped.

"It strikes me there'll be very little work done in this neighborhood to-day," he remarked. "I'd no idea there were so many people in the valley with time to spare. The only thing that's missing is the beast they're after."

"An otter is an almost invisible creature," Evelyn explained. "You very seldom see one, unless it's hard pressed by the dogs. There are a good many in the river, but even the trout fishers, who are about at sunrise in the hot weather and wade in the dusk, rarely come across them. Are you going to take a share in the hunt?"

"No," replied Carroll, glancing humorously at his pole. "I don't know why I brought this thing, unless it was because Mopsy sent me for it. I'd rather stay and watch with you. Splashing through a river after a little beast that I don't suppose they'd let an outsider kill doesn't interest me. I don't see why I should want to kill it, anyway. Some of you English people have sporting ideas I can't understand. I struck a young man the other day — a well-educated man by the looks of him — who was spending the afternoon happily with a ferret by a corn stack, killing rats with a club. He seemed uncommonly pleased with himself because he'd got four of them."

"Oh," chided Mabel, "you're as bad as the silly people who call killing things cruel! I wouldn't have thought it of you!"

Vane laughed.

"I've seen him drop a deer with a single-shot rifle when it was going through thick brush almost as fast as a locomotive; and I believe that he once assisted in killing a panther in a thicket where you couldn't

see two yards ahead. The point is that he meant to eat the deer — and the panther had been taking a rancher's hogs."

"I'm sorry I brought him," Mabel pouted. "He's not a sportsman."

"I really think there's some excuse for the more vigorous sports," Evelyn maintained. "Of course, you can't eliminate a certain amount of cruelty; but, admitting that, isn't it just as well that men who live in a luxurious civilization should be willing to plod through miles of heather after grouse, risk their limbs on horseback, or spend hours in cold water? These are bracing things; they imply some moral discipline. It really can't be nice to ride at a dangerous fence, or to flounder down a rapid after an otter when you're stiff with cold. The effort to do so must be wholesome."

"A sure thing," Carroll agreed. "The only trouble is that when you've got your fox or otter, it isn't worth anything. A good many of the people in the newer lands, every day, have to make something of the kind of effort you describe. In their case, the results are wagon trails, valleys cleared for orchards, or new branch railroads. I suppose it's a matter of opinion, but if I'd put in a season's risky work, I'd rather have a piece of land to grow fruit on or a share in a mineral claim — you get plenty of excitement in prospecting for that — than a fox's tail."

He strolled along the bank with Evelyn, following the hunt up-stream. Suddenly he looked around.

"Mopsy's gone; and I don't see Vane."

"After all, he's one of us," Evelyn laughed. "If

you're born in the North Country, it's hard to keep out of the river when you hear the otter hounds."

"But Mopsy's not going in!"

"I'm afraid I can't answer for her."

They took up their station behind a growth of alders, and for a while the dogs went trotting by in twos and threes or swam about the pool, but nothing else broke the surface of the leaden-colored water. Then there was a cry, an outbreak of shouting, a confused baying, and half a dozen hounds dashed past. More followed, heading up-stream along the bank, with a tiny brown terrier panting behind them. Evelyn stretched out her hand.

"Look!"

Carroll saw a small gray spot — the top of the otter's head — moving across the slacker part of the pool, with a very slight, wedge-shaped ripple trailing away from it. It sank the next moment; a bubble or two rose; and then there was nothing but the smooth flow of water.

A horn called shrilly; a few whip-cracks rang out like pistol-shots; and the dogs took the water, swimming slowly here and there. Men scrambled along the bank. Some, entering the river, reinforced the line spread out across the head rapid while others joined the second row wading steadily up-stream and splashing about as they advanced with iron-tipped poles. Nothing rewarded their efforts. The dogs suddenly turned and went down-stream; and then everybody ran or waded toward the tail outflow. A clamor of shouting and baying broke out; and floundering men and swimming dogs went down the stream together in a confused mass. There was a brief

silence. The hounds came out and trotted to and fro along the bank; and dripping men clambered after them.

Evelyn laughed as she pointed to Vane among the leading group. He looked even wetter than the others.

"I don't suppose he meant to go in. It's in the blood."

"There's no reason why he shouldn't, if it amuses him," Carroll replied. "When I first met him, he'd have been more careful of his clothes."

A little later the dogs were driven in again, and this time the whole of the otter's head was visible as it swam up-stream. The animal was flagging, and on reaching shoaler water it sprang out altogether now and then, rising and falling in the stronger stream with a curious serpentine motion. In fact, as head and body bent in the same sinuous curves, it looked less like an animal than a plunging fish. The men guarding the rapid stood ready with their poles, and more were wading and splashing up both sides of the pool. The otter's pace was getting slower; sometimes it seemed to stop; and now and then it vanished among the ripples. Carroll saw that Evelyn's face was intent, though there were signs of shrinking in it.

"I'll tell you what you are thinking," he said. "You want that poor little beast to get away."

"I believe I do," Evelyn confessed. "And you?"

"I'm afraid I'm not much of a sportsman, in this sense."

They watched with strained attention. The girl could not help it, though she dreaded the climax. Her sympathies were now with the hard-pressed, exhausted

creature that was making a desperate fight for its life. The pursuers were close upon it, the swimming dogs leading them; and ahead lay a foaming rush of water which seemed less than a foot deep, with men spread out across it. The shouting from the bank had ceased, and everybody waited in tense expectancy when the otter disappeared. The dogs reached the rapid, where they were washed back a few yards before they could make headway up-stream. Men who came splashing close upon them left the water to scramble along the bank; and then they stopped abruptly, while the dogs swam in an uncertain manner about the still reach beyond. They came out in a few minutes and scampered up and down among the stones, evidently at fault, for there was no sign of the otter anywhere. Incredible as it seemed, the hunted creature, an animal that would probably weigh about twenty-four pounds, had crept up the rush of water among the feet of those who watched for it and vanished unseen into the sheltering depths beyond.

Evelyn sighed with relief.

"I think it will escape," she said. "The river's rather full after the rain, which is against the dogs, and there isn't another shallow for some distance. Shall we go on?"

They strolled forward behind the dogs, which were again moving up-stream; but they turned aside to avoid a bit of woods, and it was some time later when they came out upon a rocky promontory dropping steeply to the river. Just there, the water flowed through a deep gorge, down the sides of which great oaks and ashes straggled. In front of Carroll and his companion a ragged face of rock fell about twenty

feet; but there was a little soil among the stones below, and a dense growth of alders interspersed with willows, fringed the water's edge. The stream swirled in deep black eddies beneath their drooping branches, though a little farther on it poured tumultuously between scattered boulders into the slacker pool. The rock sloped on one side, and there was a bank of underbrush near the foot of the descent.

The hunt was now widely scattered about the reach. Men crept along slippery ledges above the water and moved over dangerously slanting slopes, half hidden among the trees; a few were in the river. Three or four of the dogs were swimming; the others, spread out in twos and threes, trotted in and out among the undergrowth.

Presently, a figure creeping along the foot of the rock not far away seized Carroll's attention.

"It's Mopsy!" he exclaimed. "The foothold doesn't look very safe among those stones, and there seems to be deep water below."

He called out in warning, but the girl did not heed. The willows were thinner at the spot she had reached, and, squeezing herself through them, she leaned down, clinging to an alder branch.

"He's gone to holt among the roots!" she cried.

Three or four men running along the opposite bank apparently decided that she was right, for the horn was sounded and here and there a dog broke through the underbrush. Just as the first-comers reached the rapid, there was a splash. It was a moment or two before Evelyn or Carroll, who had been watching the dogs, realized what had happened; then the blood ebbed from the girl's face. Mabel had disappeared.

Running a few paces forward, Carroll saw what looked like a bundle of outspread garments swing round in an eddy. It washed in among the willows, and he heard a faint cry.

"Help! — Quick! I've caught a branch!"

He could not see the girl now, but an alder branch was bending sharply, and he flung a rapid glance around him. The summit of the rock on which he stood rose above the trees. Had there been a better landing, he would have faced the risky fall, but it seemed impossible to alight among the stones without a broken leg. Even if he came down uninjured, there was a barrier of tangled branches and densely growing withes between him and the river, and the opening through which Mabel had fallen was some distance away. Farther down-stream, he might reach the water by a reckless jump, as the promontory sloped toward it there, but he would not be able to swim back against the current. His position was a painful one; there was nothing that he could do.

The next moment, men and dogs went scrambling and swimming down the rapid. They were in hot pursuit of the otter, which had left its hiding place, and it was evident that the girl, clinging to a branch beneath the willows, had escaped their attention. Carroll shouted savagely as his comrade appeared among the tail of the hunt below. The others were too much occupied to heed; or perhaps they concluded that he was urging them on.

"Help! Mabel!" Carroll shouted again and again, gesticulating wildly in his desperation.

Vane, waist-deep in the water, seemed to catch the girl's name and understand. In a few moments he

was swimming down the pool along the edge of the alders. Then Carroll saw that Evelyn expected him to take some part in the rescue.

"Get down before it's too late!" she cried.

Carroll spread out his hands, as if to beg her forbearance. While every impulse urged him to the leap, he endeavored to keep his head. He fancied that he would be wanted later, and it was obvious that he would not be available if he lay upon the rocks below with broken bones.

"I can't do any good just now," he tried to explain, knowing that he was right and yet feeling horribly ashamed. "She's holding on, and Wallace will reach her in a moment or two."

Evelyn broke out at him in an agony of fear and anger.

"You coward! Will you let her drown?"

She turned and ran forward, but Carroll, dreading that she meant to attempt the descent, seized her shoulder and held her fast. While he grappled with her, Vane's voice rose from below, and he let his hands drop.

"Wallace has her. There's no more danger," he said quietly.

Evelyn suddenly recovered a small degree of calm. Even amid the stress of her terror, she recognized the assurance in the man's tone. He had blind confidence in his comrade's prowess, and his next words made this impression clearer.

"Don't be afraid. He'll never let go until he brings her out."

Standing, breathless, a pace or two apart, they saw Vane and the girl appear from beneath the willows

and wash away down-stream. The man was swimming, but he was hampered by his burden, and once he and Mabel sank almost from sight in a whirling eddy. Carroll said nothing. Turning, he ran along the sloping ridge until the fall was less and the trees were thinner; then he leaped out into the air. He broke through the alders amid a rustle of bending boughs, and disappeared; but a moment or two later his shoulders shot out of the water close beside Vane, and the two men went down the stream with Mabel between them.

Evelyn scrambled wildly along the ridge, and when she reached the foot of it, Vane was helping Mabel up the sloping bank of gravel. The girl's drenched garments clung about her, and her wet hair was streaked across her face, but she seemed able to stand. The hunt had swept on through shoaler water, but there was a cheer from the stragglers across the river. Evelyn clutched her sister, half laughing, half sobbing, and incoherently upbraided her. Mabel shook herself free, and her first remark was characteristic.

"Oh, don't make a silly fuss! I'm only wet through. Wallace, take me home."

She tried to shake out her dripping skirt, and Vane picked her up, as she seemed to expect it. The others followed when he pushed through the underbrush toward a neighboring meadow. Evelyn, however, was still a little unnerved, and when they reached a gap in a wall she stopped and leaned heavily against the stones.

"I think I'm more disturbed than Mopsy is," she said to Carroll. "What I felt must be some excuse

for me. You were right, of course. I'm sorry for what I said; it was unjustifiable."

Carroll laughed lightly.

"Anyway, it was perfectly natural; but I must confess that I felt some temptation to make a spectacular fool of myself. I might have jumped into those alders, but it's most unlikely that I could have got out of them."

Evelyn looked at him with a new respect. He had not troubled to point out that he had not flinched from the jump when it seemed likely to be of service.

"How could you have the sense to think of that?" she asked.

"I suppose it's a matter of practise. One can't work among the ranges and rivers without learning to make the right decision rapidly. When you don't, you get badly hurt. With most of us, the thing has to be cultivated; it's not instinctive."

Evelyn was struck by the explanation. This acquired coolness was a finer thing, and undoubtedly more useful, than hot-headed gallantry, though she admired the latter. She was young, and physical prowess appealed to her; besides, it had been displayed in saving her sister's life. Carroll and his comrade were men of varied and romantic experience; and they possessed, she fancied, qualities not shared by all their fellows.

"Wallace was splendid in the water!" she exclaimed, uttering part of her thoughts aloud.

"I thought rather more of him in the city," Carroll replied. "That kind of thing was new to him, and I'm inclined to believe that I'd have let the people he had to negotiate with have the mine for a good deal

less than he eventually got for it. But I've said something about that before; and, after all, I'm not here to play Boswell."

The girl was surprised at the apt allusion; it was not what she would have expected from the man. As she had not wholly recovered her composure, she forgot what Vane had told her about him, and her comment was an incautious one:

"How did you hear of him?"

Carroll parried this with a smile.

"You don't suppose you can keep those old fellows to yourselves — they're international. But hadn't we better be getting on? Let me help you through the gap."

They reached the Dene some time later, and Mabel, very much against her wishes, was sent to bed. Shortly afterward Carroll came across Vane, who had changed his clothes and was strolling up and down among the shrubberies.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Vane looked embarrassed.

"For one thing, I'm keeping out of Mrs. Chisholm's way; she's inclined to be effusive. For another, I'm trying to think out what I ought to do. We'll have to pull out very shortly; and I had meant to have an interview with Evelyn to-day. That's why I feel uncommonly annoyed with Mopsy for falling in."

Carroll made a grimace.

"If that's how it strikes you, any advice I could offer would be wasted. A sensible man would consider it a promising opportunity."

"And trade upon it? As you know, there wasn't

the slightest risk, with branches that one could get hold of, and a shelving bank almost within reach."

"Do you really want the girl?"

"That impression's firmly in my mind," Vane said curtly.

"Then you'd better pitch your Quixotic notions overboard and tell her so."

Vane frowned but made no answer; and Carroll, recognizing that his comrade was not inclined to be communicative, left him pacing up and down.

## CHAPTER XI

### VANE WITHDRAWS

DUSK was drawing on, but there was still a little light in the western sky, when Vane strolled along the terrace in front of the Dene. In the distance the ranks of fells rose black and solemn out of filmy trails of mist, but the valley had faded to a trough of shadow. A faint breeze was stirring, and the silence was broken by the soft patter of withered leaves which fluttered down across the lawn. Vane noticed it all by some involuntary action of his senses, for although, at the time, he was oblivious to his surroundings, he afterward found that he could recall each detail of the scene with vivid distinctness. He was preoccupied and eager, but fully aware of the need for coolness, for it was quite possible that he might fail in the task he had in hand.

Presently he saw Evelyn, for whom he had been waiting, cross the opposite end of the terrace. Moving forward he joined her at the entrance to a shrubbery walk. A big, clipped yew with a recess in which a seat had been placed stood close by.

"I have been sitting with Mopsy," said Evelyn. "She seems very little the worse for her adventure — thanks to you." She hesitated and her voice grew softer. "I owe you a heavy debt — I am very fond of Mopsy."

"It's a great pity she fell in," Vane declared curtly.

Evelyn looked at him in surprise. She scarcely thought he could regret the efforts he had made on her sister's behalf, but that was what his words implied. He noticed her change of expression.

"The trouble is that the thing might seem to give me some claim on you; and I don't want that," he explained. "It cost me no more than a wetting; I hadn't the least difficulty in getting her out."

His companion was still puzzled. She could find no fault with him for being modest about his exploit, but that he should make it clear that he did not require her gratitude struck her as unnecessary.

"For all that, you did bring her out," she persisted. "Even if it causes you no satisfaction, the fact is of some importance to us."

"I don't seem to be beginning very fortunately. What I mean is that I don't want to urge my claim, if I have one. I'd rather be taken on my merits." He paused a moment with a smile. "That's not much better, is it? But it partly expresses what I feel. Leaving Mopsy out altogether, let me try to explain — I don't wish you to be influenced by anything except your own idea of me. I'm saying this because one or two points that seem in my favor may have a contrary effect."

Evelyn made no answer, and he indicated the seat.

"Won't you sit down? I have something to say."

The girl did as he suggested, and his smile died away.

"Would you be astonished if I were to ask you to marry me?"

He leaned against the smooth wall of yew, looking down at her with an impressive steadiness of gaze. She could imagine him facing the city men from whom he had extorted the full value of his mine in the same fashion, and, in a later instance, so surveying the eddies beneath the osiers, when he had gone to Mabel's rescue. It was borne in upon her that they would better understand each other.

"No," she answered. "If I must be candid, I am not astonished." Then the color crept into her cheeks as she met his gaze. "I suppose it is an honor; and it is undoubtedly a — temptation."

"A temptation?"

"Yes," said Evelyn, mustering her courage to face a crisis she had dreaded. "It is only due you that you should hear the truth — though I think you suspect it. Besides — I have some liking for you."

"That is what I wanted you to own!" Vane broke in.

She checked him with a gesture. Her manner was cold, and yet there was something in it that stirred him more than her beauty.

"After all," she explained, "it does not go very far, and you must try to understand. I want to be quite honest, and what I have to say is — difficult. In the first place, things are far from pleasant for me here; I was expected to make a good marriage, and I had my chance in London. I refused to profit by it, and now I'm a failure. I wonder whether you can realize what a temptation it is to get away?"

Vane frowned.

"Yes," he responded. "It makes me savage to think of it! I can, at least, take you out of all this.

If you hadn't had a very fine courage, you wouldn't have told me."

Evelyn smiled, a curious wry smile.

"It has only prompted me to behave, as most people would consider, shamelessly; but there are times when one must get above that point of view. Besides, there's a reason for my candor — had you been a man of different stamp, it's possible that I might have been driven into taking the risk. We should both have suffered for a time, but we might have reached an understanding — not to intrude on each other — through open variance. As it is, I could not do you that injustice, and I should shrink from marrying you with only a little cold liking."

The man held himself firmly in hand. Her calmness had infected him, and he felt that this was not an occasion for romantic protestations, even had he felt capable of making them, which was not the case. As a matter of fact, such things were singularly foreign to his nature.

"Even that would go a long way with me, if I could get nothing better," he declared. "Besides, you might change. I could surround you with some comfort; I think I could promise not to force my company upon you; I believe I could be kind."

"Yes," assented Evelyn. "I shouldn't be afraid of harshness from you; but it seems impossible that I should change. You must see that you started handicapped from the beginning. Had I been free to choose, it might have been different, but I have lived for some time in shame and fear, hating the thought that some one would be forced on me."

He said nothing and she went on.

"Must I tell you? You are the man!"

His face grew hard and for a moment he set his lips tight. It would have been a relief to express his feelings concerning his host just then.

"If you don't hate me for it now, I'm willing to take the risk," he said at length. "It will be my fault if you hate me in the future; I'll try not to deserve it."

He fancied that she was yielding, but she roused herself with an effort.

"No. Love on one side may go a long way, if it is strong enough — but it must be strong to overcome the many clashes of thought and will. Yours" — she looked at him steadily —"would not stand the strain."

Vane started.

"You are the only woman I ever wished to marry," he declared vehemently.

He paused and spread out his hands.

"What can I say to convince you?"

"I'm afraid it's impossible. If you had wanted me greatly, you would have pressed the claim you had in saving Mopsy, and I should have forgiven you that; you would have urged any and every claim. As it is, I suppose I am pretty"— her lips curled scornfully —"and you find that some of your ideas and mine agree. It isn't half enough! Shall I tell you that you are scarcely moved as yet?"

It flashed upon Vane that he was confronted with the reality. Her beauty had appealed to him, and her other qualities — her reserved graciousness with its tinge of dignity, her insight and her comprehension — had also had their effect; but they had only awakened

admiration and respect. He desired her as one desires an object for its rarity and preciousness; but this, as she had told him, was not enough. Behind her physical and mental attributes, and half revealed by them, there was something deeper: the real personality of the girl. It was elusive, mystic, with a spark of immaterial radiance which might brighten human love with its transcendent glow; but, as he dimly realized, if he won her by force, it might recede and vanish altogether. He could not, with strong ardor, compel its clearer manifestation.

"I think I am moved as much as it is possible for me to be."

Evelyn shook her head.

"No; you will discover the difference some day, and then you will thank me for leaving you your liberty. Now I beg you to leave me mine and let me go."

Vane stood silent a minute or two, for the last appeal had stirred him to chivalrous pity. He was shrewd enough to realize that if he persisted he could force her to come to him. Her father and mother were with him; she had nothing — no commonplace usefulness nor trained abilities — to fall back on if she defied them. But it was unthinkable that he should brutally compel her.

"Well," he yielded at length, "I must try to face the situation; I want to assure you that it is not a pleasant one to me. But there's another point — I'm afraid I've made things worse for you. Your people will probably blame you for sending me away."

Evelyn did not answer this, and he broke into a grim smile.

"Well," he added, "I think I can save you any trouble on that score — though the course I'm going to take isn't flattering, if you look at it in one way. I want you to leave me to deal with your father."

He took her consent for granted, and leaning down laid a hand lightly on her shoulder.

"You will try to forgive me for the anxiety I have caused you? The time I've spent here has been very pleasant, but I'm going back to Canada in a day or two. Perhaps you'll think of me without bitterness now and then."

He turned away; and Evelyn sat still, glad that the strain was over, thinking earnestly. The man was gentle and considerate as well as forceful, and to some extent she liked him. Indeed, she admitted that she had not met any man she liked as much; but that was not going very far. Then she began to wonder at her candor, and to consider if it had been necessary. It was curious that this was the only man she had ever taken into her confidence. It struck her that her next suitor would probably be a much less promising specimen. On the other hand, since her views on the subject differed from those her parents held, it was consoling to remember that eligible suitors for the daughter of an impoverished gentleman were likely to be scarce.

It had grown dark when she rose and entering the house went up to Mabel's room. The girl looked at her sharply as she came in.

"So you have got rid of him!" she said. "I think you're very silly."

"How did you know?" Evelyn asked with a start.

"I heard him walking up and down the terrace, and

I heard you go out. You can't walk over raked gravel without making a noise. He went along to join you, and it was a good while before you came back at different times. I've been waiting for this the last day or two."

Evelyn sat down with a rather strained smile.

"Well, I have sent him away."

Mabel regarded her indignantly.

"You'll never get another chance like this one. If I'd been in your place, I'd have had Wallace if it had cost me no end of trouble to get him. He said something about its being a pity I wasn't older, one day, and I told him that I wasn't by any means as young as I looked. If you had only taken him, I could have worn decent frocks. Nobody could call the last one that!"

This was a favorite grievance, and Evelyn ignored it; but Mabel had more to say.

"I suppose," she went on, "you don't know that Wallace has been getting Gerald out of trouble?"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. I'll tell you what I know. Wallace saw Gerald in London — he told us that — and we all know that Gerald couldn't pay his debts a little while ago. You remember he came down to Kendall and went on and stayed the next night with the Claytons. It isn't astonishing that he didn't come here, after the row there was on the last occasion."

"Go on," prompted Evelyn impatiently. "What has his visit to the Clayton's to do with it?"

"Well, you don't know that I saw Gerald in the afternoon. After all, he's the only brother I've got; and as Jim was going to the station with the trap I

made him take me. The Claytons were in the garden; we were scattered about, and I heard Frank and Gerald, who had strolled off from the others, talking. Gerald was telling him about some things he'd bought — they must have been expensive, because Frank asked him where he got the money. Gerald laughed and said he'd had an unexpected stroke of luck that had set him straight again. Now, of course Gerald got no money from home, and if he'd won it he would have told Frank how he did so. Gerald always would tell a thing like that."

Evelyn was filled with confusion and hot indignation. She had little doubt that Mabel's surmise was correct.

"I wonder whether he has told anybody; though it's scarcely likely."

Mabel laughed.

"Of course he hasn't. We all know what Gerald is. Before I came home, I asked him what he thought of Wallace. He said he was a good sort, or something like that, and I saw that he had a reason for saying it; but he must go on in his patronizing style that Wallace was rather Colonial, though he hadn't drifted too far — not beyond reclamation. After all, Wallace was one of — us — before he went out; and if Carroll's Colonial he's the kind of man I like. I was so angry with Gerald I wanted to slap him!"

There was no doubt that Mabel was a staunch partizan, and Evelyn sympathized with her. She was, of course, acquainted with her brother's character, and she was filled with indignant contempt for him. It was intolerable that he should have allowed Vane to

discharge his debts and then have alluded to him in terms of indulgent condescension.

"It strikes me Wallace ought to get his money back, now that you have sent him away," Mabel added. "But of course that's most unlikely. It wouldn't take Gerald long to waste it."

Evelyn rose and, making some excuse, left the room. She could feel her face growing hot, and Mabel had unusually keen eyes and precocious powers of deduction. A suspicion which had troubled her more than Gerald's conduct had lately crept into her mind, and it now thrust itself upon her attention; several things pointed to the fact that her father had taken the same course her brother had done. She felt that had she heard Mabel's information before the interview with Vane, she might have yielded to him in an agony of humiliation. Mabel had summed up the situation with stinging candor and crudity — Vane, who had been defrauded, was entitled to recover his money. For a few moments Evelyn was furiously angry with him, and then, growing calmer, she recognized that this was unreasonable. She could not imagine any idea of a compact originating with the man, and he had quietly acquiesced in her decision.

Soon after she left her sister, Vane walked into the room which Chisholm reserved for his own use. It was handsomely furnished, and the big, light-oak writing-table and glass-fronted cabinets were examples of artistic handicraft. The sight of them jarred on Vane, who had already surmised that it was the women of the Chisholm family who were expected to practise self-denial. Chisholm was sitting at the table with

some papers in front of him and a cigar in his hand, and Vane drew out a chair and lighted his pipe before he addressed him.

"I've made up my mind to sail on Saturday, instead of next week," he said abruptly.

"You have decided rather suddenly, haven't you?" Chisholm suggested.

Vane knew that what his host wished to know was the cause of the decision, and he meant to come to the point. He was troubled by no consideration for the man.

"The last news I had indicated that I was wanted," he replied. "After all, there is only one reason why I have abused Mrs. Chisholm's hospitality so long."

"Well?"

"You will remember what I asked you some time ago. I had better say that I retire from the position — abandon the idea."

Chisholm started and his florid face grew redder, while Vane, in place of embarrassment, was conscious of a somewhat grim amusement. It seemed curious that a man of Chisholm's stamp should have any pride.

"What am I to understand by that?" Chisholm asked with some asperity.

"I think that what I said explained it. Bearing in mind your and Mrs. Chisholm's influence, I've an idea that Evelyn might have yielded, if I'd strongly urged my suit; but that was not by any means what I wanted. I'd naturally prefer a wife who married me because she wished to do so. That's why, after thinking the thing over, I've decided to — withdraw."

Chisholm straightened himself in his chair in fiery indignation, which he made no attempt to conceal.

"You mean that after asking my consent, and seeing more of Evelyn, you have changed your mind! Can't you understand that it's an unpardonable confession — one which I never fancied a man born and brought up in your station could have brought himself to make?"

Vane looked at him with an impassive face.

"It strikes me as largely a question of terms — I may not have used the right one. Now that you know how the matter stands, you can describe it in any way that sounds nicest. In regard to your other remark, I've been in a good many stations, and I must admit that until lately none of them were likely to promote much delicacy of sentiment."

"So it seems!" Chisholm was almost too hot to sneer. "But can't you realize how your action reflects upon my daughter?"

Vane held himself in hand. He had only one object: to divert Chisholm's wrath from Evelyn to himself, and he fancied that he was succeeding in this. For the rest, he was conscious of a strong resentment against the man. Evelyn had told him that he had started handicapped.

"It can't reflect upon her unless you talk about it, and both you and Mrs. Chisholm have sense enough to refrain from doing that," he answered dryly. "I can't flatter myself that Evelyn will grieve over me." Then his manner changed. "Now we'll get down to business. I don't purpose to call in that loan, which will, no doubt, be a relief to you."

He rose leisurely and strolled out of the room.

Shortly afterward he met Carroll in the hall, and the latter glanced at him sharply.

"What have you been doing?" he inquired. "There's a look in your eyes I seem to remember."

Vane laughed.

"I suppose I've been outraging the rules of decency; but I don't feel ashamed. I've been acting the uncivilized Westerner, though it's possible that I rather strained the part. To come to the point, however, we pull out for the Dominion first thing to-morrow."

Carroll asked no further questions; he did not think it would serve any purpose. He contented himself with making arrangements for their departure, which they took early on the morrow. Vane had a brief interview with Mabel, and then by her contrivance he secured a word or two with Evelyn alone.

"It is possible," he told her, "that you may hear some hard things of me — and I count upon your not contradicting them. After all, I think you owe me that favor. There's just another matter — now that I won't be here to trouble you, won't you try to think of me leniently?"

He held her hand for a moment and then turned away, and a few minutes later he and Carroll left the Dene.

## CHAPTER XII

### IN VANCOUVER

ABOUT a fortnight after Vane's return to Vancouver, he sat one evening on the veranda of Nairn's house, in company with his host and Carroll, lazily looking down upon the inlet. The days were growing shorter; the air was clear and cool; and the snow upon the heights across the still, blue water was creeping lower down. The clatter of a steamer's winches rose sharply from the wharf, and the sails of two schooners gleamed against the dark pines that overhang the Narrows.

In some respects, Vane was glad to be back in the western city. At first, the ease and leisure at the Dene had their charm for him, but by degrees he came to chafe at them. The green English valley, hemmed in by its sheltering hills, was steeped in too profound a tranquillity; the stream of busy life passed it by with scarcely an entering ripple to break its drowsy calm. One found its atmosphere enervating, dulling to the faculties. In the new West, however, one was forcibly thrust into contact with a strenuous activity. Life was free and untrammeled there; it flowed with a fierce joyousness in natural channels, and one could feel the eager throb of it.

Yet the man was not content. He had been to the mine, and in going and coming he had ridden far over

a very rough trail, but the physical effort had not afforded a sufficient outlet for his pent-up energies. He had afterward lounged about the city for nearly a week, and he found this becoming monotonous.

Nairn presently referred to one of the papers in his hand.

"Horsfield has been bringing up that smelter project again, and there's something to be said in favor of his views," he remarked. "We're paying a good deal for reduction."

"We couldn't keep a smelter going, at present," Vane objected.

"There are two or three low-grade mineral properties in the neighborhood of the Clermont that have had very little development work done on them. They can't pay freight on their raw product, but I'm thinking that we'd encourage their owners to open up the mines, and we'd get their business, if we had a smelter handy."

"It wouldn't amount to much," Vane replied. "Besides, there's another objection — we haven't the money to put up a thoroughly efficient plant."

"Horsfield's ready to find part of it and to do the work."

"I know he is." Vane frowned. "It strikes me he's suspiciously anxious. The arrangement he has in view would give him a pretty strong hold upon the company; and there are ways in which he could squeeze us."

"It's possible. But, looking at it as a purely personal matter, there are inducements he could offer ye. Horsfield's a man who has the handling of other

folks' money, if he has no that much of his own. It might be wise to stand in with him."

"So he hinted," Vane answered dryly.

"Your argument was about the worst you could have used, Mr. Nairn," Carroll laughed.

"Weel," drawled Nairn good-humoredly, "I'm no urging it. I would not see your partner make enemies for the want of a warning."

"He'd probably do so, in any case; it's a gift of his. On the other hand, it's fortunate that he has a way of making friends. The two things sometimes go together."

Vane turned to Nairn with signs of impatience.

"It might save trouble if I state that while I'm a director of the Clermont I expect to be content with a fair profit on my stock in the company."

"He's modest," Carroll commented. "What he means is that he doesn't propose to augment that profit by taking advantage of his position."

"It's a creditable idea, though I'm no sure it's as common as might be desired. While I have to thank ye for it, I would not consider the explanation altogether necessary." Nairn's eyes twinkled for a moment, and then he turned seriously to Vane. "Now we come to another point — the company's a small one, the mine is doing satisfactorily, and the moment's favorable for the floating of mineral properties. If we got an option on the half-developed claims near the Clermont and went into the market, it's likely that an issue of new stock would meet with the favor of investors."

"I suppose so," Vane responded. "I'll support

such a scheme when I can see how an increased capital could be used to advantage and am convinced about the need for a smelter. At present that's not the case."

"I mentioned it as a duty — ye'll hear more of it. For the rest, I'm inclined to agree with ye."

A few minutes later, Nairn went into the house with Carroll, and as they entered he glanced at his companion.

"In the present instance, Mr. Vane's views are sound," he said. "But I see difficulties before him in his business career."

"So do I," smiled Carroll. "When he grapples with them it will be by a frontal attack."

"A bit of compromise is judicious now and then."

"In a general way, it's not likely to appeal to Vane. When he can't get through by direct means, there'll be something wrecked. You'd better understand what kind of man he is."

Nairn made a sign of concurrence.

"It's no the first time I've been enlightened upon the point."

Shortly after they had disappeared, Miss Horsfield came out of another door, and Vane rose when she approached him. He had always found her a pleasant companion.

"Mrs. Nairn told me I would find you and the others on the veranda," she informed him. "She said she would join you presently. It is too fine an evening to stay in."

"I'm alone, as you see. Nairn and Carroll have just deserted me; but I can't complain. What pleases me most about this house is that you can do what

you like in it, and — within limits — the same thing applies to this city."

Jessy laughed as she sank gracefully into the chair he drew forward. She was, as a rule, deliberate in her movements, and her pose was usually an effective one.

"Yes," she replied; "I think that would please you. But how long have you been back?"

"A fortnight, yesterday."

There was a hint of reproach in Jessy's glance.

"Then I think Mrs. Nairn might have brought you over to see us."

Vane wondered whether she meant that she was surprised that he had not come of his own accord. He felt mildly flattered. She was interesting, and knew how to listen sympathetically, as well as how to talk, and she was also a lady of station in the western city.

"I was away at the mine a good deal of the time," he explained.

"I wonder if you are sorry to get back?"

Turning a little, Vane indicated the climbing city, rising tier on tier above its water-front; and then the broad expanse of blue inlet and the faint white line of towering snow.

"Wouldn't anything I could say in praise of Vancouver be a trifle superfluous?" he asked.

Jessy recognized that he had parried her question neatly, but this did not deter her. She was anxious to learn whether he had felt any regret at leaving England, or, to be more concise, if there was anybody in that country from whom he had reluctantly parted. She admitted that the man attracted her. There was a breezy freshness about him which he had brought

from the rocks and woods, and though she was acquainted with a number of young men whose conversation was characterized by snap and sparkle, they needed toning down. This miner was set apart from them by something which he had doubtless acquired in youth in the older land.

"That wasn't quite what I meant," she returned. "We don't always want to be flattered. I'm in search of information. You told me that you had been eight or nine years in this country, and life must be rather different yonder. How did it and the people you belong to strike you after the absence?"

"It's difficult to explain," Vane replied with an air of amused reflection which hinted that he meant to get away from the point. "On the whole, I think I'm more interested in the question as to how I struck them. It's curious that whereas some people here insist on considering me English, I've a suspicion that they looked upon me as a typical Colonial there."

"One wouldn't like to think you resented it."

"How could I? This land sheltered me when I was an outcast; it provided me with a living, widened my views, and set me on my feet."

"Ah!" murmured Jessy, "you are the kind we don't mind taking in. The others go back and try to forget us, or abuse us. But you haven't given me very much information yet."

"Well," drawled Vane, "the best comparison is supplied by my first remark — that in this city you can do what you like. You're rather fenced in yonder. If you're of a placid disposition, that, no doubt, is comforting, because it shuts out unpleasant things. On the other hand, if you happen to be restless and

active, the fences are inconvenient, for you can't always climb over — and it is not considered proper to break them down. Still, having admitted that, I'm proud of the old land. If one has means and will conform, it's the finest country in the world! It's only the fences that irritate me."

"Fences would naturally be obnoxious to you. But we have some here."

"They're generally built loose, of split-rails, and not nailed. An energetic man can pull off a bar or two and stride over. If it's necessary, he can afterward put them up again, and there's no harm done."

"Would you do the latter?"

Vane's expression changed.

"No. I think if there were anything good on the other side, I'd widen the gap so that the less agile and the needy could crawl through." He smiled at her. "You see, I owe some of them a good deal. They were the only friends I had when I first tramped, jaded and footsore, about the Province."

Jessy was pleased with his answer. She had heard of the free hospitality of the bush choppers, and she thought it was a graceful thing that he should acknowledge his debt to them. She was also pleased that she could lead him on to talk unreservedly.

"Now at last you'll be content to rest a while," she suggested. "I dare say you deserve it."

"It's strange that you should say that, because just before you came out of the house I was thinking that I'd sat still long enough. It's a thing that gets monotonous. One must keep going on."

"Take care that you don't walk over a precipice some day when you have left all the fences behind.

But I've kept you from your meditations, and I had better see if Mrs. Nairn is coming."

He was sitting alone, lighting a cigar, when he noticed a girl whose appearance seemed familiar in the road below. Moving along the veranda, he recognized her as Kitty, and hastily crossed the lawn toward her. She was accompanied by a young man whom Vane had once or twice seen in the city, and she greeted him with evident pleasure.

"Tom," she introduced, when they had exchanged a few words, "this is Mr. Vane." Turning to Vane she added: "Mr. Drayton."

Vane liked the man's face and manner. He shook hands with him, and then looked back at Kitty.

"What are you doing now; and how are little Elsie and her mother?"

Kitty's face clouded.

"Mrs. Marvin's dead. Elsie's with some friends at Spokane, and I think she's well looked after. I've given up the stage. Tom"— she explained shyly — "didn't like it. Now I'm with some people at a ranch near the Fraser, on the Westminster road. There are two or three children, and I'm very fond of them."

"She won't be there long," Drayton interposed. "I've wanted to meet you for some time, Mr. Vane. They told me at the office that you were away."

Vane smiled comprehendingly.

"I suppose my congratulations will not be out of place? Won't you ask me to the wedding?"

Kitty blushed.

"Will you come?"

"Try!"

"There's nobody we would rather see," declared Drayton. "I'm heavily in your debt, Mr. Vane."

"Pshaw!" rejoined Vane. "Come to see me any time — to-morrow, if you can manage it."

Drayton said that he would do so, and shortly afterward he and Kitty moved away. Vane turned back across the lawn; but he was not aware that Jessy Horsfield had watched the meeting from the veranda and had recognized Kitty, whom she had once seen at the station. She had already ascertained that the girl had arrived in Vancouver in Vane's company, and, in view of the opinion she had formed of him, this somewhat puzzled her; but she decided that one must endeavor to be charitable. Besides, having closely watched the little group, she was inclined to believe from the way Vane shook hands with the man that there was no danger to be apprehended from Kitty.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A NEW PROJECT

VANE was sitting alone in the room set apart for the Clermont Company in Nairn's office when Drayton was shown in. He took the chair Vane indicated and lighted a cigar the latter gave him.

"Now," he began with some diffidence, "you cut me off short when I met you the other day, and one of my reasons for coming over was to get through with what I was saying then. It's just this — I owe you a good deal for taking care of Kitty; she's very grateful and thinks no end of you. I want to say I'll always feel that you have a claim on me."

Vane smiled at him. It was evident that Kitty had taken her lover into her confidence with regard to her trip aboard the sloop, and that she had done so said a good deal for her. He thought one might have expected a certain amount of half-jealous resentment, or even faint suspicion, on the man's part; but there was no sign of this. Drayton believed in Kitty, and that was strongly in his favor.

"It didn't cost me any trouble," Vane replied. "We were coming to Vancouver, anyway."

Drayton's embarrassment became more obvious.

"It cost you some money — there were the tickets. Now I feel that I have to —"

"Nonsense! When you are married to Miss Blake,

you can pay me back, if it will be a relief to you. When's the wedding to be?"

"In a couple of months," answered Drayton. He saw that it would be useless to protest. "I'm a clerk in the Winstanley mills, and as one of the staff is going, I'll get a move up then. We are to be married as soon as I do."

He said a little more on the same subject, and then after a few moments' silence he added:

"I wonder if the Clermont business keeps your hands full, Mr. Vane?"

"It doesn't. It's a fact I'm beginning to regret."

Drayton appeared to consider.

"Well," he said, "people seem to regard you as a rising man with snap in him, and there's a matter I might, perhaps, bring before you. Let me explain. I'm a clerk on small pay, but I've taken an interest outside my routine work in the lumber trade of this Province and its subsidiary branches. I figured any knowledge I could pick up might stand me in some money some day. So far"—he smiled ruefully—"it hasn't done so."

"Go on," prompted Vane. His curiosity was aroused.

"It has struck me that pulping spruce—paper spruce—is likely to be scarce presently. The supply's not unlimited and the world's consumption is going up by jumps."

"There's a good deal of timber you could use for pulp, in British Columbia alone," Vane interposed.

"Sure. But there's not a very great deal that could be milled into high-grade paper pulp; and it's getting rapidly worked out in most other countries. Then,

as a rule, it's mixed up with firs, cedars and cypresses; and that means the cutting of logging roads to each cluster of milling trees. There's another point — a good deal of the spruce lies back from water or a railroad, and in some cases it would be costly to bring in a milling plant or to pack the pulp out."

"That's obvious; anyway, where you would have to haul every pound of freight over a breakneck divide."

Drayton leaned forward confidentially.

"Then if one struck high-grade paper spruce — a whole valley full of it — with water power and easy access to the sea, there ought to be money in the thing?"

"Yes," Vane answered with growing interest; "that strikes me as very probable."

"I believe I could put you on the track of such a valley."

Vane looked at him thoughtfully.

"We'd better understand each other. Do you want to sell me your knowledge? And have you offered it to anybody else?"

His companion answered with the candor he expected.

"Kitty and I aren't going to find it easy to get along — rents are high in this city. I want to give her as much as I can; but I'm willing to leave you to do the square thing. The Winstanley people have their hands full and won't look at any outside matter, and the one or two people I've spoken to don't seem anxious to consider it. It's mighty hard for a little man to launch a project."

"It is," Vane agreed sympathetically.

"Then," Drayton continued, "the idea's not my own. It was a mineral prospector — a relative of mine — who struck the valley on his last trip. He's an old man, and he came down played out and sick. Now I guess he's slowly dying." He paused a moment. "Would you like to see him?"

"I'll go with you now, if it's convenient," Vane replied.

Drayton said that he might spare another half-hour without getting into trouble, and they crossed the city to where a row of squalid frame shacks stood on its outskirts. In the one they entered, a gaunt man with grizzled hair lay upon a rickety bed. A glance showed Vane that the man was very frail, and the harsh cough that he broke into as the colder air from outside flowed in made the fact clearer. Drayton, hastily shutting the door and explaining the cause of the visit, motioned Vane to sit down.

"I've heard of you," said the prospector, fixing his eyes on Vane. "You're the man who located the Clermont — and put the project through. You had the luck. I've been among the ranges half my life — and you can see how much I've made of it! When I struck a claim that was worth anything somebody else got the money."

Vane had reasons for believing that this was not an uncommon experience.

"Well," the man continued, "you look straight — and I've got to take some chances. It's my last stake. We'll get down to business. I'll tell you about that spruce."

He spoke for a few minutes, and then asked abruptly:

"What are you going to offer?"

Vane had not been certain that he would make any offer at all; but, as had befallen him once or twice before, the swift decision flashed instinctively into his mind.

"If I find that the timber and its location come up to your account of it, I'll pay you so many dollars down — whatever we can agree on — when I get my lease from the land office. Then I'll make another equal payment the day we start the mill. But I don't bind myself to record the timber or to put up a mill, unless I'm convinced that it's worth while."

"I'd rather take less money and have a small share in the concern; and Drayton must stand in."

"It's a question of terms," Vane replied. "I'll consider your views."

They discussed it for a while, and when they had at length arrived at a provisional understanding, the prospector made a sign of acquiescence.

"We'll let it go at that; but the thing will take time, and I'll never get the money. If you exercise your option, you'll sure pay it down to Seely?"

"Celia's his daughter," Drayton explained. "He has no one else. She's a waitress at the —— House." He named a hotel of no great standing in the city. "Comes home at nights, and looks after him as best she can."

Vane glanced round the room. It was evident that Celia's earnings were small; but he noticed several things which suggested that she had lavished loving care upon the sick man, probably at the cost of severe self-denial. This was what he would have expected, for he had spent most of his nine years in Canada

among the people who toil the hardest for the least reward.

"Yes," he answered; "I'll promise that. But, as I pointed out, while we have agreed on the two payments, I reserve the right of deciding what share your daughter and Drayton are to have, within the limits sketched out. I can't fix it definitely until I've seen the timber — you'll have to trust me."

The prospector once more looked at him steadily, and then implied by a gesture that he was satisfied. He was not in a position to dictate terms, but his confidence had its effect on the man in whom he reposed it.

"There's another thing. You'll do all you can to find that spruce?"

"Yes," Vane promised.

The man fumbled under his pillow and produced a piece cut out from a map of the Province, with rough pencil notes on the back of it.

"It was on my last prospecting trip I found the spruce," he said. "I'd been looking round, and I figured I'd strike down to the coast over the range. The creeks were full up with snow-water, and as I was held up here and there before I could get across, provisions began to run short. Then I fell down a gulch and hurt my knee, and as I had to leave my tent and it rained most of the while, I lay in the wet at nights, half-fed, with my knee getting worse. By and by I fell sick; but I had to get out of the mountains, and I was pushing on for the straits when I struck the valley where the spruce is. After that, I got kind of muddled in the head, but I went down a long valley on an easy grade and struck some Siwash

curing the last of the salmon. The trouble is, I was too sick to figure exactly where the small inlet they were camped by lies. They took me back with them to their rancherie — you could find that — and sailed me across to Comox. I came down on a steamboat, and the doctor told me I'd made my last journey."

Vane could sympathize. The narrative had been crudely matter-of-fact, but he had been out on the prospecting trail often enough to fill in the details the sick man omitted. He had slept in the rain, very scantily fed, and he could picture the starving man limping along in an agony of pain and exhaustion, with an injured knee, over boulders and broken rock and through dense tangles of underbrush strewed with mighty fallen logs.

"How far was the valley from the inlet?" he asked.

"I can't tell you. I think I was three days on the trail; but it might have been more. I was too sick to remember. Anyway, there was a creek you could run the logs down."

"Well, how far was the inlet from the rancherie?"

"I was in the canoe part of one night and some of the next day. I can't get it any clearer. We had a fair breeze. Guess thirty miles wouldn't be far out."

"That's something to go upon. How much does your daughter earn?"

It was an abrupt change of subject, but the man answered as Vane had expected. The girl's wages might maintain her economically, but it was difficult to see how she could provide for her sick father. The latter seemed to guess Vane's thoughts, for he spoke again.

"If I'd known I was done for when I was up in the bush, I wouldn't have pushed on quite so fast," he said with expressive simplicity.

Vane rose.

"If Drayton will come along with me, I'll send him back with a hundred dollars. It's part of the first payment. Your getting it now should make things a little easier for Celia."

"But you haven't located the spruce yet!"

"I'm going to locate it, if the thing's anyway possible." Vane shook hands with the man. "I expect to get off up the straits very shortly."

The prospector looked at him with relief and gratitude in his eyes.

"You're white — and I guess you'd be mighty hard to beat!"

When they reached the rutted street, which was bordered on one side by great fir stumps, Drayton glanced at Vane with open admiration.

"I'm glad I brought you across. You have a way of getting hold of people — making them believe in you. Hartley hasn't a word in writing, but he knows you mean to act square with him. Kitty felt the same thing — it was why she came down in the sloop with you."

Vane smiled, though there was a trace of embarrassment in his manner.

"Now that you mention it, I don't think Hartley was wise; and you were equally confiding. We have only arrived at a rather indefinite understanding about your share."

"We'll leave it at that. I haven't struck anybody else in this city who would hear about the thing.

Anyway, I'd prefer a few shares in the concern, as mentioned, instead of money. If you get the thing on foot, I guess it will go."

"Won't they raise trouble at the mill about your staying out?" Vane inquired. "We have still to go for that hundred dollars."

Drayton owned that it might be advisable to hurry, and they set off for the business quarter of the city.

During the remainder of the day Vane was busy on board the sloop, but in the evening he walked over to Horsfield's house with Mrs. Nairn and found Jessy and her brother at home. Horsfield presently took Vane to his smoking-room.

"About that smelter," he began. "Haven't you made up your mind yet? The thing's been hanging fire a long while."

"Isn't it a matter for the board?" Vane asked suggestively. "There are several directors."

Horsfield laughed.

"We'll face the fact: they'll do what you decide on."

Vane did not reply to this.

"Well," he said, "at present we couldn't keep a smelter big enough to be economical going, and I'm doubtful whether we would get much ore from the other properties you were talking about to Nairn."

"Did he say it was my idea?"

"He didn't; I'd reasons for assuming it. Those properties, however, are of no account."

Horsfield made no comment but waited expectantly, and Vane went on:

"If it seems possible that we can profitably increase our output later on, by means of further capital, we'll

put up a smelter. But in that case it might be economical to do the work ourselves."

"Who would superintend it?"

"I would, if necessary, with the assistance of an engineer used to such plant."

Horsfield smiled in a significant manner.

"Aren't you inclined to take hold of too much? When you have plenty in your hands, it's good policy to leave a little for somebody else. Sometimes the person who benefits is willing to reciprocate."

The hint was plain, and Nairn had said sufficient on another occasion to make it clearer; but Vane did not respond.

"If we gave the work out, it would be on an open tender," he declared. "There would be no reason why you shouldn't make a bid."

Horsfield found it difficult to conceal his disgust. He had no desire to bid on an open tender, which would prevent his obtaining anything beyond the market price.

"The question must stand over until I come back," Vane went on. "I'm going up the west coast shortly and may be away some time."

They left the smoking-room shortly afterward, and when they strolled back to the others, Vane sat down near Jessy.

"I hear you are going away," she began.

"Yes. I'm going to look for pulping timber."

"But what do you want with pulping timber?"

"It can sometimes be converted into money."

"Isn't there every prospect of your obtaining a good deal already? Are you never satisfied?"

"I suppose I'm open to take as much as I can get,"

Vane answered with an air of humorous reflection. "The reason probably is that I've had very little until lately. Still, I don't think it's altogether the money that is driving me."

"If it's the restlessness you once spoke of, you ought to put a check on it and try to be content. There's danger in the longing to be always going on."

"It's a common idea that a small hazard gives a thing a spice."

Jessy shot a swift glance at him, and she had, as he noticed, expressive eyes.

"Be careful," she advised. "After all, it's wiser to keep within safe limits and not climb over too many fences." She paused and her voice grew softer. "You have friends who would be sorry if you got hurt."

The man was stirred. She was alluring, physically, while something in her voice had its effect on him. Evelyn, however, still occupied his thoughts and he smiled at his companion.

"Thank you. I like to believe it."

Then Mrs. Nairn and Horsfield crossed the room toward them and the conversation became general.

## CHAPTER XIV

### VANE SAILS NORTH

ON the evening of Vane's departure he walked out of Nairn's room just as dusk was falling. His host was with him, and when they entered an adjacent room the elder man's face relaxed into a smile as he saw Jessy Horsfield talking to his wife. Vane stopped a few minutes to speak to them, and it was Jessy who gave the signal for the group to break up.

"I must go," she said to Mrs. Nairn. "I've already stayed longer than I intended. I'll let you have those patterns back in a day or two."

"Mair patterns!" Nairn exclaimed with dry amusement. "It's the second lot this week! Ye're surely industrious, Jessy. Women"—he addressed Vane —"have curious notions of economy. They will spend a month knitting a thing to give to somebody who does no want it, when they could buy it for half a dollar, done better by machinery. I'm no saying, however, that it does no keep them out of mischief."

Jessy laughed.

"I don't think many of us are industrious in that way now. After all, isn't it a pity that so many of the beautiful old handicrafts are dying out? No loom, for instance, could turn out some of the things your wife makes. They're matchless."

"She has an aumrie — ye can translate it bureau —

full of them. It's no longer customary to scatter them over the house. If ye mean to copy the lot, ye have a task that will take ye most a lifetime."

Mrs. Nairn's smile was half a sigh.

"There were no books and no many amusements when I was young. We sat through the long winter forenights, counting stitches, in the old gray house at Burnfoot, under the Scottish moors. That, my dear, was thirty years ago."

She shook hands with Vane as he left the house with Jessy, and standing on the stoop she watched them cross the lawn.

"I'm thinking ye'll no see so much of Jessy for the next few weeks," Nairn remarked dryly. "Has she shown ye any of yon knickknacks when she has finished them?"

His wife shook her head at him reproachfully.

"Alic," she admonished, "ye're now and then hasty in jumping at conclusions."

"Maybe. I'm no infallible, but the fault ye mention is no common in the land where we were born. I'm no denying that Jessy has enterprise, but how far it will carry her in this case is mair than I can tell."

He smiled as he recalled a scene at the station some time ago, and Mrs. Nairn looked up at him.

"What is amusing you, Alic?"

"It was just a bit idea no worth the mentioning. I think it would no count." He paused, and added with an air of reflection: "A young man's heart is whiles inconstant and susceptible."

Mrs. Nairn, ignoring the last remark, went into the house. In the meanwhile Jessy and Vane walked down

the road, until they stopped at a gate. Jessy held out her hand.

"I'm glad I met you to-night," she said. "You will allow me to wish you every success?"

There was a softness in her voice which Vane wholly failed to notice, though he was aware that she was pretty and artistically dressed. This was possibly why she made him think of Evelyn.

"Thank you," he replied. "It's nice to feel that one has the sympathy of one's friends."

He turned away, and Jessy stood watching him as he strode down the road, noticing, though it was getting dark, the free vigor of his movements. There was, she thought, something in his fine poise and swing that set him apart from other men she knew. None of them walked or carried himself as Vane did. She was, however, forced to recognize that although he had answered her courteously, there had been no warmth in his words. As a matter of fact, Vane just then was conscious of a slight relief. He admired Jessy, and he liked Nairn and his wife; but they belonged to the city; and he was glad, on the whole, to leave it behind. He was going back to the shadowy woods, where men lived naturally. The lust of fresh adventure was strong in him.

On reaching the wharf he found Kitty, with Celia Hartley, whom he had not met hitherto, awaiting him with Carroll and Drayton. A boat lay at the steps, and he and Carroll rowed the others off to the sloop. The moon was just rising from behind the black firs at the inner end of the inlet, and a little cold wind that blew down across them, faintly scented with resinous fragrance, stirred the water into tiny ripples

that flashed into silvery radiance here and there. Lights gleamed on the forestays of vessels whose tall spars were etched in high, black tracery against the dusky blue of the sky, athwart which there streamed the long smoke trail of a steamer passing out through the Narrows.

Kitty, urged by Drayton, broke into a little song with a smooth, swinging cadence that went harmoniously with the measured splash of oars; and Vane enjoyed it all. The city was dropping behind him; he felt himself at liberty. Carroll was a tried comrade; the others were simple people whose views were more or less his own. Besides, it was a glorious night and Kitty sang charmingly.

A soft glow shone out from the skylights to welcome them as they approached the sloop. When, laughing gaily, they clambered on board, Carroll led the way to the tiny saloon, which just held them all. It was brightly lighted by two nickeled lamps; flowers were fastened against the paneling, and clusters of them stood upon the table, which was covered with a spotless cloth. What was even more unusual, it was daintily set out with good china and silver. Vane took the head of it, and Carroll modestly explained that only part of the supper had been prepared by himself. The rest he had obtained in the city, out of regard for the guests, who, he added, had not lived in the bush. Presently Vane, who had been busy talking to the others, turned to Celia.

"Now that we can see each other better, I think you ought to recognize me, Miss Hartley."

The girl was young and attractive, and she blushed prettily.

"I do, of course; but I thought I'd wait until I saw whether you remembered me."

"Why should you wait?"

Celia looked confused.

"It's two or three years since I've seen you; and I've left that place."

Vane laughed. He had made her acquaintance at a workman's hotel where she was engaged, when he was differently situated, and he fancied that she was diffident about recalling the fact, now that he was obviously prosperous.

"Well," he responded, "it's only fair that I should give you supper, for once. I've always had an idea that you brought me more dessert than I was really entitled to."

"It was because you were — civil," Celia explained, though her expression suggested that the word did not convey all she meant. "Still, I can't complain of the rest of the boys."

"I wonder if you remember how astonished you were the first time you brought me supper?"

Celia smiled and Vane turned to the others.

"I'd just come in on a schooner. We'd had wild weather, during which the galley fire was generally washed out and the cook had some difficulty in getting us anything to eat. Miss Hartley brought me a double supply. She must have thought I needed it."

"There was mighty little left," the girl retorted.

The others laughed, but Vane went on, in a reminiscent manner:

"I was wearing a pair of old gum-boots with one toe torn off, and my jacket was split right up the back. When I went up-town the next day, people looked at

me suspiciously. The trade of the Province is pretty bad when you see men in Vancouver dressed as I was. The fact that sticks in my mind most clearly, however, is that on the following morning, when I'd arranged to see a man who might give me a job, Miss Hartley offered to sew up the tear for me. I was uncommonly glad to let her."

Celia colored again, but it was evident that she was not displeased. Kitty smiled at him, and there was appreciation in Drayton's eyes.

"Were you surprised when she offered to sew it?" Kitty inquired.

"Now, you have helped me on to what I wanted to say. I wasn't surprised — how could I be? The kind of people I'd met out here had seldom much money, or much of anything; but I had generally less, and they held out a hand when I needed it and gave me what they had. It stirs me in a way that almost hurts to think of it."

Then Carroll started the general chatter, which went on after the meal was finished, and nobody appeared to notice that Kitty sat with her hand in Drayton's amid the happy laughter. Even Celia, who had her grief to grapple with, smiled bravely. Vane had given them champagne, the best in the city, though they drank sparingly; and at last, when Celia made a move to rise, Drayton stood up with his glass in his hand.

"We must go, but there's something to be done," he announced. "It's to thank our host and wish him success. It's a little boat he's sailing in, but she's carrying a big freight, if our good wishes count for anything."

They emptied the glasses, and Vane replied:

"My success is yours. You have all a stake in the venture, and that piles up my responsibility. If the spruce is still in existence, I've got to find it."

"And you're going to find it!" declared Drayton. "It's a sure thing!"

Vane divided the flowers between Celia and Kitty, but when they went up on deck Kitty raised one bunch and kissed it.

"Tom won't mind," she laughed. "Take that one back from Celia and me — for luck."

They got down into the boat, and Carroll handed them a basket of crockery and table linen which Drayton promised to have delivered at the hotel. Then, while the girls called back to Vane, Drayton rowed away, and the boat was fading out of sight when Kitty's voice once more reached the men on board. She was singing a well-known Jacobite ballad.

Carroll laughed softly.

"It strikes me as appropriate," he said. "Considering what his Highland followers suffered on his account and what the women thought of him, some of the virtues they credited the Young Chevalier with must have been real." He raised his hand. "You may as well listen!"

Vane stood still a moment, with the blood hot in his face, as the refrain rang more clearly across the sparkling water:

"Better lo'ed ye cannot be —
Will ye no come back to me?"

"I don't know whether you feel flattered, but I've an idea that Kitty and Celia would go through fire

for you; and Drayton seems to share their confidence," Carroll went on in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"Celia mended my jacket," Vane replied. "I got a month's work as a result of it." Then he began to shake the mainsail loose. "I believe we both went rather far in our talk to-night; but we have got to find the spruce!"

"So you have said already. Hadn't you better heave the boom up with the topping lift?"

They got the mainsail onto her, broke out the anchor and set the jib; and as the boat slipped away before a freshening breeze Vane sat at the helm while Carroll stood on the foredeck, coiling up the gear. The moon was higher now; the broad sail gleamed a silvery gray; the ripples, which were getting bigger, flashed and sparkled as they streamed back from the bows; and the lights of the city dropped fast astern. Vane was conscious of a keen exhilaration. He had started on a new adventure. He was going back to the bush; and he knew that, no matter how his life might change, the wilderness would always call to him. In spite of this, however, he was, as he had said, conscious of an unusual responsibility. Hitherto he had fought for what he could get, for himself; but now Kitty's future partly depended on his efforts, and his success would be of vast importance to Celia.

He had a very friendly feeling toward both the girls. Indeed, all the women he had met of late had attracted him, in different ways. It was hard to believe that any of them possessed unlovable qualities, though there was not one among them to compare with Evelyn. Whatever he liked most in the others — intelligence, beauty, tenderness, courage — reminded him of

her. Kitty, he thought, belonged to the hearth; she personified gentleness and solace; it would be her part to diffuse cheerful comfort in the home. Jessy would make an ambitious man's companion; a clever counselor, who would urge him forward if he lagged. Celia he had not placed yet; but Evelyn stood apart from all.

She appealed less to his senses and intellect than she did to a sublimated something in the depths of his nature; and it somehow seemed fitting that her image should materialize before his mental vision as the sloop drove along under the cloudless night sky while the moonlight poured down glamour on the shining water. Evelyn harmonized with such things as these.

It was true that she had repulsed him; but that, he felt, was what he deserved for entering into an alliance against her with her venial father. He was glad now that he had acquiesced in her dismissal of him, since to have stood firm and broken her to his will would have brought disaster upon both of them. He felt that she had not wholly escaped him, after all; by and by he would go back and seek her favor by different means. Then she might, perhaps, forgive him and listen.

The breeze came down fresher as they drove out through the Narrows. Carroll had gone below; and, brushing his thoughts aside, Vane busied himself hauling in some of the mainsheet, while the water splashed more loudly beneath the bows. The great black firs rolled by in somber masses over his port hand, and presently the last of the lights were blotted out. He was alone, flitting swiftly and smoothly across the glittering sea.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE FIRST MISADVENTURE

THE breeze freshened fiercely with the red and fiery dawn. Vane, who had gone below, was advised of it by being flung off the locker in the saloon, where he sat with coffee and crackers before him. The jug, overturning, spilled its contents upon him, and the crackers were scattered, but he picked himself up in haste and scrambled out into the well. He found the sloop slanted over with a good deal of her lee deck submerged in rushing foam, and Carroll bracing himself against the strain upon the tiller. To windward, the sea looked as if it had been strewed with feathers, for there were flecks and blurs of white everywhere.

"I'll let her come up when you're ready!" Carroll shouted. "We'd better get some sail off her, if we mean to hold on to the mast!"

He thrust down his helm; and the sloop, forging round to windward, rose upright, with her heavy main-boom banging to and fro. After that, they were desperately busy for a few minutes. Vane wished that they had engaged a hand in Vancouver, instead of waiting to hire a Siwash somewhere up the coast. There was the headsail to haul to windward, which was difficult, and the mainsheet to get in; then the two men, standing on the slippery, inclined deck,

struggled hard to haul the canvas down to the boom. The jerking spar smote them in the ribs; once or twice the reefing tackle beneath it was torn from their hands; but they mastered the sail, tying two reefs in it, to reduce its size; and the craft drove away with her lee rail just awash.

"You'd better go down and get some crackers," Vane advised his comrade. "You'll find them rolling up and down the floor. I spilled the coffee, but perhaps the kettle's still on the stove. Anyhow, you may not have an opportunity later."

"It looks like that," Carroll agreed. "The wind's backing northward, and that means more of it before long. You can call, if you want me."

He disappeared below, and Vane sat at the helm with a frown on his face. An angry coppery glare streamed down upon the white-flecked water which gleamed in the lurid light. It was very cold, but there was a wonderful quality that set the blood tingling in the nipping air. Even upon the high peaks and in the trackless bush, one fails to find the bracing freshness that comes with the dawn at sea.

Vane, however, knew that the breeze would increase and draw ahead, which was unfortunate, because they would have to beat, fighting for every fathom they slowly made. There was no help for it, and he buttoned his jacket against the spray. By the time Carroll came up the sloop was plunging sharply, pitching showers of stinging brine all over her when the bows went down. They drove her at it stubbornly most of the day, making but little to windward, while the seas got bigger and whiter, until they had some trouble to keep the light boat

they carried upon the deluged deck. At last, when she came bodily aft amid a frothing cascade which poured into the well, Vane brought the sloop round, and they stretched away to eastward, until they could let go the anchor in smooth water beneath a wall of rock. They were very wet, and were stiff with cold, for winter was drawing near.

"We'll get supper," said Vane. "If the breeze drops a little at dusk, which is likely, we'll go on again."

Having eaten little since dawn, they enjoyed the meal; and Carroll would have been content to remain at anchor afterward. The tiny saloon was comfortably warm, and he thought it would be pleasanter to lounge away the evening on a locker, with his pipe, than to sit amid the bitter spray at the helm. The breeze had fallen a little, but the firs in a valley ashore were still wailing loudly. Vane, however, was proof against his companion's hints.

"With a head wind, we'll be some time working up to the rancherie, and then we have thirty miles of coast to search for the inlet Hartley reached. After that, there's the valley to locate; he was uncertain how far it lay from the beach."

"It couldn't be very far. You wouldn't expect a man who was sick and badly lame to make any great pace."

"I can imagine a man, who knew he must reach the coast before he starved, making a pretty vigorous effort. If he were worked-up and desperate, the pain might turn him savage and drive him on, instead of stopping him. Do you remember the time we crossed the divide in the snow?"

"I could remember it, if I wanted to," Carroll answered with a shiver. "As it happens, that's about the last thing I'm anxious to do."

"The trouble is that there are a good many valleys in this strip of country, and we may have to try a number before we strike the right one. Winter's not far off, and I can't spend very much time over this search. As soon as the man we put in charge of the mine has tried his present system long enough to give us something to figure on, I want to see what can be done to increase our output. We haven't marketed very much refined metal yet."

"There's no doubt that it would be advisable," Carroll answered thoughtfully. "As I've pointed out, you have spent a good deal of the cash you got when you turned the Clermont over to the company. In fact, that's one reason why I didn't try to head off this timber-hunting scheme. You can't spend much over the search, and if the spruce comes up to expectations, you ought to get it back. It would be a fortunate change, after your extravagance in England."

Vane frowned.

"That's a subject I don't want to talk about. We'll go up and see what the weather's like."

Carroll shivered when they stood in the well. It was falling dusk, and the sky was a curious cold, shadowy blue. A nipping wind came down across the darkening firs ashore, but there was no doubt that it had fallen somewhat, and Carroll resigned himself when Vane began to pull the tiers off the mainsail.

In a few minutes they were under way, the sloop

heading out toward open water with two reefs down in her mainsail, a gray and ghostly shape of slanted canvas that swept across the dim, furrowed plain of sea. By midnight the breeze was as strong as ever, but they had clear moonlight and they held on; the craft plunging with flooded decks through the white combers, while Carroll sat at the helm, battered by spray and stung with cold.

When Vane came up, an hour or two later, the sea was breaking viciously. Carroll would have put up his helm and run for shelter, had the decision been left to him; but he saw his comrade's face in the moonlight and refrained from any suggestion of that nature. There was a spice of dogged obstinacy in Vane, which, although on the whole it made for success, occasionally drove him into needless difficulties. They held on; and soon after day broke, with its first red flush ominously high in the eastern sky, they stretched in toward the land, with a somewhat sheltered bay opening up beyond a foam-fringed point ahead of them. Carroll glanced dubiously at the white turmoil in the midst of which black fangs of rock appeared.

"Will she weather the point on this tack?" he asked.

"She'll have to! We'll have smoother water to work through, once we're round, and the tide's helping her."

They drove on, though it occurred to Carroll that they were not opening up the bay very rapidly. The light was growing, and he could now discern the orderly phalanxes of white-topped combers that crumbled into a chaotic spouting on the point's outer

end. It struck him that the sloop would not last long if she touched bottom there; but once more, after a glance at Vane's face, he kept silent. After all, Vane was leader; and when he looked as he did then, he usually resented advice. The mouth of the bay grew wider, until Carroll could see most of the forest-girt shore on one side of it; but the surf upon the point was growing unpleasantly near. Wisps of spray whirled away from it and vanished among the scrubby firs clinging to the fissured crags behind. The sloop, however, was going to windward, for Vane was handling her with nerve and skill. She had almost cleared the point when there was a rattle and a bang inside of her. Carroll started.

"It's the centerboard coming up! It must have touched a boulder!"

"Then jump down and lift it before it strikes another and bends!" cried Vane. "She's far enough to windward to keep off the beach without it."

Carroll went below and hove up the centerboard, which projected several feet beneath the bottom of the craft; but he was not satisfied that the sloop was far enough off the beach, as Vane seemed to be, and he got out into the well as soon as possible.

The worst of the surf was abreast of their quarter now, and less-troubled water stretched away ahead. Carroll had hardly noticed this, however, when there was a second heavy crash and the sloop stopped suddenly. The comber to windward that should have lifted her up, broke all over her, flinging the boat on deck upon the saloon skylight and pouring inches deep over the coaming into the well. Vane was hurled from the tiller. His wet face was

smeared with blood, from a cut on his forehead, but he seized a big oar to shove the sloop off, when she swung upright, moved, and struck again. The following sea hove her up; there was a third, less violent, crash; and as Vane dropped the oar and grasped the helm, she suddenly shot ahead.

"She'll go clear!" he shouted. "Jump below and see if she's damaged!"

Carroll got no farther than the scuttle, for the saloon floorings on the depressed side were already awash, and he could hear an ominous splashing and gurgling.

"It's pouring into her!" he cried.

"Then, you'll have to pump!"

"We passed an opening some miles to lee. Wouldn't it be better if you ran back there?" Carroll suggested.

"No! I won't run a yard! There's another inlet not far ahead and we'll stand on until we reach it. I'd put her on the beach here, only that she'd go to pieces with the first shift of the wind to westward."

Carroll agreed with this opinion; but there is a great difference between running to leeward with the sea behind the vessel and thrashing to windward when it is ahead, and he hesitated.

"Get the pump started! We're going on!" Vane said impatiently.

Fortunately the pump was a powerful one, of the semi-rotary type, and they had nearly two miles of smoother water before they stretched out of the bay upon the other tack. When they did so, Carroll, glancing down again through the scuttle, could not

flatter himself that he had reduced the water. It was comforting, however, to see that it had not increased, though he did not expect that state of affairs to last. When they drove out into broken water, he found it difficult to work the crank. The plunges threw him against the coaming, and the sea poured in over it continually. There are not many men who feel equal to determined toil before their morning meal, and the physical slackness is generally more pronounced if they have been up most of the preceding night; but Carroll recognized that he had no choice. There was too much sea for the boat, even if they could have launched her, and he could make out no spot on the beach where it seemed possible to effect a landing if they ran the sloop ashore. As a result of this, it behooved him to pump.

After half an hour of it, he was breathless and exhausted, and Vane took his place. The sea was higher; the sloop wetter than she had been; and there was no doubt that the water was rising fast inside of her. Carroll wondered how far ahead the inlet lay; and the next two hours were anxious ones to both of them. Turn about, they pumped with savage determination and went back, gasping, to the helm to thrash the boat on. They drove her remorselessly; and she swept through the combers, tilted and streaming, while the spray scourged the helmsman's face as he gazed to weather. The men's arms and shoulders ached from working in a cramped position; but there was no help for it. They toiled on furiously, until at last the crest of a crag for which they were heading sloped away in front of them.

A few minutes later they drove past the end of it

into a broad lane of water. The wind was suddenly cut off; the combers fell away; and the sloop crept slowly up the inlet, which wound, green and placid, among the hills, with long ranks of firs dropping steeply to the edge of the water. Vane loosed the pump handle, and striding to the scuttle looked down at the flood which splashed languidly to and fro below.

"It strikes me as fortunate that we're in," he commented. "Another half-hour would have seen the end of her. Let her come up a little! There's a smooth beach to yonder cove."

She slid in quietly, scarcely rippling the smooth surface of the tiny basin, and Carroll laid her on the beach.

"Now," advised Vane, "we'll drop the boom on the shore side to keep her from canting over; and then we'll get breakfast. We'll see where she's damaged when the tide ebbs."

As most of their stores had lain in the flooded lockers, from which there had been no time to extricate them, the meal was not an appetizing one. They were, however, glad to have it; and rowing ashore afterward, they lay on the shingle in the sunshine while the sloop was festooned with their drying clothes. There was no wind in that deep hollow, and they were thankful, for the weather was already getting cold.

"If she has only split a plank or two, we can patch her up," Vane remarked. "There are all the tools we'll want in the locker."

"Where will you get new planks?" Carroll in-

quired. "I don't think we have any spikes that would go through the frames."

"That is the trouble. I expect I'll have to make a trip across to Comox for them in a sea canoe. We're sure to come across a few Siwash somewhere in the neighborhood." Then he knit his brows. "I can't say that this expedition is beginning fortunately."

"There's no doubt on that point," Carroll agreed.

"Well, the sloop has to be patched up; and until I find that spruce I'm going on — anyway, as long as the provisions hold out. If we're not through with the business then, we'll come back again."

Carroll made no comment. It was not worth while to object, when Vane was obviously determined.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BUSH

IT was a quiet evening, nearly a fortnight after the arrival of the sloop. Pale sunshine streamed into the cove, and little glittering ripples lapped lazily along the shingle. The placid surface of the inlet was streaked with faint blue lines where wandering airs came down from the heights above, and now and then an elfin sighing fell from the ragged summits of the firs. When it died away, the silence was broken only by the pounding of a heavy hammer and the crackle of a fire.

Carroll sat beside the latter, alternately holding a stout plank up to the blaze and dabbling its hot surface with a dripping mop. His face was scorched, and he coughed as the resinous-scented smoke drifted about his head and floated in heavy, blue wisps half-way up the giant trunks behind him. A big sea canoe lay drawn up not far away, and one of its copper-skinned Siwash owners lounged on the shingle, stolidly watching the white men. His comrade was then inside the sloop, holding a big stone against one of her frames, while Vane crouched outside, swinging a hammer. Her empty hull flung back the thud of the blows, which rang far across the trees.

Vane was bare-armed and stripped to shirt and trousers. He had arrived from Comox across the

straits at dawn that morning. It was a long trip and they had had wild weather on the journey, but he had set to work with characteristic energy as soon as he landed. Now, though the sun was low, he was working harder than ever, with the flood tide, which would shortly compel him to desist, creeping up to his feet.

It is a difficult matter to fit a new plank into the rounded bilge of a boat, particularly when one is provided with inadequate appliances. One requires a good eye for curves, for the planks need much shaping. They must also be driven into position by force. Two or three stout shores were firmly wedged against the side of the boat, and these encumbered Vane in the free use of his arms. His face was darkly flushed and he panted heavily and now and then flung vitriolic instructions to the Siwash inside the craft. Carroll, watching him with quiet amusement, was on the whole content that the tide was rising, for his comrade had firmly declined to stop for dinner, and he was conscious of a sharpened appetite. It was comforting to reflect that Vane would be unable to get the plank into place before the evening meal, for if there had been any prospect of his doing so, he would certainly have postponed his dinner.

Presently he stopped a moment and turned to Carroll.

"If you were any use in an emergency, you'd be holding up for me, instead of that wooden image inside! He will back the stone against any frame except the one I'm nailing."

"The difficulty is that I can't be in two places at the same time," Carroll retorted good-naturedly.

"Shall I leave this plank? You can't get it in to-night."

"I'm going to try," Vane answered grimly.

He turned around to direct the Siwash and then cautiously hammered in one of the wedges a little farther. Swinging back the hammer, he struck a heavy blow. The result was disastrous, for there was a crash and one of the shores shot backward, striking him on the knee. He jumped with a savage cry, and the next moment there was a sharp snapping, and the end of the plank sprang out. Then another shore gave way; and when the plank fell clattering at his feet, Vane whirled the hammer round his head and hurled it violently into the bush. This appeared to afford him some satisfaction, and he strode up the beach, with the blood dripping from the knuckles of one hand.

"That's the blamed Siwash's fault!" he muttered. "I couldn't get him to back up when I put the last spike in."

"Hadn't you better tell him to come out?" Carroll suggested.

"No!" thundered Vane. "If he hasn't sense enough to see that he isn't wanted, he can stay where he is all night! Are you going to get supper, or must I do that, too?"

Carroll merely smiled and set about preparing the meal, which the two Siwash partook of, and afterward departed with some paper currency. Then Vane, walking down the beach, came back with the plank. Lighting his pipe, he pointed to one or two broken nails in it. The water was now rippling softly about

the sloop, and the splash of canoe paddles came up out of the distance in rhythmic cadence.

"That's the cause of the trouble," he explained. "It cost me a week's journey to get the package of galvanized spikes — I could have managed to split a plank or two out of one of these firs. The storekeeper fellow assured me they were specially annealed for heading up. If I knew who the manufacturers were, I'd have pleasure in telling them what I think of them. If they set up to make spikes, they ought to make them, and empty every keg that won't stand the test out on to the scrap-heap."

Carroll smiled. The course his partner had indicated was the one he would have adopted. He was characterized by a somewhat grim idea of efficiency, and never spared his labor to attain it, though the latter fact now and then had its inconveniences for those who cooperated with him, as Carroll had discovered. The latter had no doubt that Vane would put the planks in, if he spent a month over the operation.

"I wouldn't have had this trouble if you'd been handier with tools," Vane went on. "I can't see why you never took the trouble to learn how to use them."

"My abilities aren't as varied as yours; and the thing strikes me as bad economy," Carroll replied. "Skill of the kind you mention is worth about three dollars a day."

"You were getting two dollars for shoveling in a mining ditch when I first met you."

"I was," Carroll assented good-humoredly. "I

believe another month or two of it would have worn me out. It's considerably pleasanter and more profitable to act as your understudy; but a fairly proficient carpenter might have bungled the matter."

Vane looked embarrassed.

"Let it pass. I've a pernicious habit of expressing myself unfortunately. Anyhow, we'll start again on those planks the first thing to-morrow."

He stretched out his aching limbs beside the fire, and languidly watched the firs grow dimmer and the mists creep in ghostly trails down the steep hillside. Presently Carroll broke the silence.

"Wallace," he advised, "wouldn't it be wiser if you met that fellow Horsfield to some extent?"

"No," Vane answered decidedly. "I have no intention of giving way an inch. It would only encourage the man to press me on another point, if I did. I'm going to have trouble with him, and it seems to me that the sooner it comes the better. There's room for only one controlling influence in the Clermont Mine."

Carroll smoked in silence for a while. His comrade had successfully carried out most of the small projects he had undertaken in the bush, and though fortune had, perhaps, favored him, he had every reason to be satisfied with the result of his efforts as a prospector. He had afterward held his own in the city, mainly by simple unwavering determination. Carroll, however, realized that to guard against the wiles of a clever man like Horsfield, who was unhampered by any scruples, might prove a very different thing.

"In that case, it might be as well to stay in Van-

couver as much as possible and keep your eye on him," he suggested.

"The same idea has struck me since we sailed. The trouble is that until I've decided about the pulp mill he'll have to go unwatched — for the same reason that prevented you from holding up for me and steaming the plank."

"If any unforeseen action of Horsfield's made it necessary, you could let this pulp project drop."

"You ought to understand why that's impossible. Drayton, Kitty and Hartley count on my exertions; the matter was put into my hands only on the condition that I did all that I could. They're poor people and I can't go back on them. If we can't locate the spruce, or it doesn't seem likely to pay for working up, there's nothing to prevent my abandoning the undertaking; but I'm not at liberty to do so just because it would be a convenience to myself. Hartley got my promise before he told me where to search."

Carroll changed the subject.

"It might have been better if you had made the directors' qualification higher. You would have been more sure of Horsfield then, because he would have been less likely to do anything that might depreciate the value of his stock."

"I had to get a few good names to make it easier for men of standing to join me. They wouldn't have been willing to subscribe for too many shares until they saw how the thing would go. Anyhow, so long as he's a director, Horsfield must hold a stipulated amount of stock. He's actually holding a good deal."

"The limit's rather a low one. Suppose he sold

out down to it; he wouldn't mind having the value of the rest knocked down, if he could make more than the difference by some jobbery. Of course, we're only a small concern, and we'll have to raise more capital sooner or later. I've an idea that Horsfield might find his opportunity then."

"If he does, we must try to be ready for him," Vane replied. "I sat up most of last night with the spritsail sheet in my hand, and I'm going to sleep."

He strolled away to the tent they had pitched on the edge of the bush, but Carroll sat a while smoking beside the fire with a thoughtful face. He was suspicious of Horsfield and foresaw trouble; more particularly now that his comrade had undertaken a project which seemed likely to occupy a good deal of his attention. Hitherto, Vane had owed part of his success to his faculty of concentrating all his powers upon one object.

They rose at dawn the next morning, and by sunset had fitted the new planks. Two days later, they sailed northward, and eventually they found the rancherie Hartley mentioned. They had expected to hire a guide there, but the rickety wooden building was empty. Vane decided that its Siwash owners, who made long trips in search of fish and furs, had left it for a time, and he pushed on again.

He had now to face an unforeseen difficulty; there were a number of openings in that strip of coast, and Hartley's description was of no great service in deciding which was the right one. During the next day or two, they looked into several bights, and seeing no valleys opening out of them, went on again. One evening, however, they ran into an inlet with a

forest-shrouded hollow at the head of it. Here they moored the sloop close in with a sheltered beach and after a night's rest got ready their packs for the march inland. Carroll regretted they had not hired the Indians with whom his comrade had crossed the straits.

"We would have traveled a good deal more comfortably if you had brought those Siwash along to pack for us," he observed.

"If you had been with them on the canoe trip, you might think differently," Vane answered with a laugh. "Besides, they're in the habit of going to Comox and might put some enterprising lumber men on our trail."

"There's one thing I'm going to insist on," Carroll declared. "We'll leave enough provisions on board to last us until we get back to civilization, even if we have a head wind. I've made one or two journeys on short rations."

Vane agreed to this, and after rowing ashore and hiding the boat among the undergrowth, they proceeded to strap their packs about them. There is an art in this, for the weight must be carried where it will be felt and retard one's movements least. They had a light tent without poles — which could be cut when wanted — two blankets, an ax, and one or two cooking utensils, besides their provisions. A newcomer from the cities would probably not have carried his share for half a day, but in that rugged land mineral prospector and survey packer are accustomed to travel heavily burdened, and the men had followed both these vocations.

In front of them a deep trough opened up in the

hills, but it was filled with giant forest, through which no track led, and only those who have traversed the dim recesses of the primeval bush can fully understand what this implies. The west winds swept through that gateway, reaping as they went, and here and there tremendous trees lay strewed athwart one another with their branches spread abroad in impenetrable tangles. Some had fallen amid the wreckage left by previous gales, which the forest had partly made good, and there was scarcely a rod of the way that was not obstructed by half-rotted trunks. Then there were thick bushes, and an undergrowth of willows where the soil was damp, with thorny brakes and matted fern in between. In places the growth was almost like a wall, and the men, skirting the inlet, were glad to scramble forward among the rough boulders and ragged driftwood at the water's edge for some minutes at a time, until it was necessary to leave the beach behind.

After the first few minutes there was no sign of the gleaming water. They had entered a region of dim green shade, where the moist air was heavy with resinous smells. The trunks rose about them in tremendous columns, thorns clutched their garments, and twigs and brittle branches snapped beneath their feet. The day was cool, but the sweat of tense effort dripped from them, and when they stopped for breath at the end of an hour, Vane estimated that they had gone a mile.

"I'll be content if we can keep this up," he said.

"It isn't likely," Carroll replied with a trace of dryness, glancing down at a big rent in his jacket.

A little farther on, they waded with difficulty

through a large stream, and Carroll stopped and glanced round at a deep rift in a crag on one side of them.

"I don't know whether that could be considered a valley; but we may as well look at it."

They scrambled forward, and reaching gravelly soil where the trees were thinner, Vane surveyed the opening. It was very narrow and appeared to lose itself among the rocks. The size of the creek which flowed out of it was no guide, for those ranges are scored by running water.

"We won't waste time over that ravine," Vane concluded. "I noticed a wider one farther on. We'll see what it's like; though Hartley led me to understand that he came down a straight and gently sloping valley. The one we're in answers the description."

It was two hours before they reached the second opening, and then Vane, unstrapping his pack, clambered up the steep face of a crag. When he came back, his face was thoughtful. He sat down and lighted his pipe.

"This search seems likely to take us longer than I expected," he said. "To begin with, there are a number of inlets, all of them pretty much alike, along this part of the coast, but I needn't go into the reasons for supposing that this is the one Hartley visited. Taking it for granted that we're right, we're up against another difficulty. So far as I could make out from the top of that rock, there's a regular series of ravines running back into the hills."

"Hartley told you he came straight down to tidewater, didn't he?"

"That's not much of a guide. The slope of every fissure seems to run naturally from the inland watershed to this basin. Hartley was sick and it was raining all the time, and coming out of any of these ravines he'd only have to make a slight turn to reach the water. What's more, he could only tell me that he was heading roughly west. Allowing that there was no sun visible, that might have meant either northwest or southwest, which gives us the choice of searching the hollows on either side of the main valley. Now, it strikes me as most probable that he came right down the main valley itself; but we have to face the question as to whether we should push straight on, or search every opening that might be called a valley?"

"What's your idea?" Carroll rejoined.

"That we ought to go into the thing systematically, and look at every ravine we come to."

Carroll nodded agreement.

"I guess you're right."

They strapped their packs about them and struggled on again. Stopping half an hour for dinner, they plodded all the afternoon up a long hollow, which rose steadily in front of them. It was narrow, and in places the bottom of it was so choked with fallen trunks that they were forced for the sake of a clearer passage to take to the creek, where they alternately stumbled among big boulders and splashed through shallow pools. The water, which was mostly melted snow, was very cold.

The light was fading down in the deep rift when, winding round a spur through a tangle of clinging underbrush, they saw the timber thin off ahead. In

a few minutes Vane stopped with an exclamation, and Carroll, overtaking him, loosened his pack. They stood upon the edge of the timber, but in front of them a mass of soil and stones ran up almost vertically to a great outcrop of rock high above.

"If Hartley had come down that, he'd have remembered it," Vane remarked grimly.

"It's obvious," Carroll agreed, sitting down with a sigh of weariness. "We'll try the next one to-morrow; I don't move another step to-night."

Vane laughed.

"I've no wish to urge you. There's hardly a joint in my body that doesn't ache." He flung down his pack and stretched himself with an air of relief. "That's what comes of civilization and soft living. It would be nice to sit still now while somebody brought me my supper."

As there was nobody to do so, he took up the ax and set about hewing chips off a fallen trunk while Carroll made a fire. Then he cut the tent poles and a few armfuls of twigs for a bed, and in half an hour the camp was pitched and a meal prepared. Darkness closed down on them while they ate, and they afterward lay a while, smoking and saying little, beside the sinking fire, while the red light flickered upon the massy trunks and fell away again. Then they crawled into the tent and wrapped their blankets round them.

## CHAPTER XVII

### VANE POSTPONES THE SEARCH

WHEN Vane rose early the next morning, there was frost in the air. The firs glistened with delicate silver filigree, and thin spears of ice stretched out from behind the boulders in the stream. The smoke of the fire thickened the light haze that filled the hollow, and when breakfast was ready the men ate hastily, eager for the exertion that would put a little warmth into them.

"We've had it a good deal colder on other trips. I suppose I've been getting luxurious, for I seem to resent it now," observed Vane. "There's no doubt that winter's beginning earlier that I expected up here. As soon as you can strike the tent, we'll get a move on."

Carroll made no comment. He had a vivid recollection of one or two of those other journeys, during which they had spent arduous days floundering through slushy snow and had slept in saturated blankets, and sometimes shelterless in bitter frost. Carroll had endured these things without complaint, though he had never attained to the cheerfulness his comrade usually displayed. He was willing to face hardship, when it promised to lead to a tangible result, but he failed to understand the curious satisfaction

Vane assumed to feel in ascertaining exactly how much weariness and discomfort he could force his flesh to bear.

Vane, however, was not singular in this respect; there are men in the newer lands who, if they do not actually seek it, will seldom make an effort to avoid the strain of overtaxed muscles and exposure to wild and bitter weather. They have imbibed the pristine vigor of the wilderness, and conflict with the natural forces braces instead of daunting them. One recognizes them by their fixed and steady gaze, their direct and deliberate speech, and the proficiency that most display with ax and saw and rifle. But the effect of this Spartan training is not merely physical; the men who leave the bush and the ranges, as a rule, come to the forefront in commerce and industry. Endurance, swiftness of action and stubborn tenacity are apt to carry their possessor far anywhere.

Vane and his comrade needed these qualities during the following week. The valley grew more wild and rugged as they proceeded. In places, its bottom was filled with muskegs, cumbered with half-submerged, decaying trunks of fallen trees; and when they could not spring from one crumbling log to another they sank in slime and water to the knee. Then there were affluents of the main river to be waded through, and every now and then they were forced back by impenetrable thickets to the hillside, where they scrambled along a talus of frost-shattered rock. They entered transverse valleys, and after hours of exhausting labor abandoned the search of each in turn and plodded back to the one they had

been following. Their boots and clothing suffered; their packs were rent upon their backs; and their provisions diminished rapidly.

At length, one lowering afternoon, they were brought to a standstill by the river which forked into two branches, one of which came foaming out of a cleft in the rocks. This would have mattered less, had it flowed across the level; but just there it had scored itself out a deep hollow, from which the roar of its turmoil rose in long reverberations. Carroll, aching all over, stood upon the brink and gazed ahead. He surmised from the steady ascent and the contours of the hills that the valley was dying out and that they should reach the head of it in another day's journey. The higher summits, however, were veiled in leaden mist, and there was a sting in the cold breeze that blew down the hollow and set the ragged firs to wailing. Then Carroll glanced dubiously at the dim, green water which swirled in deep eddies and boiled in white confusion among the fangs of rock sixty or seventy feet below. Not far away, the stream was wider and, he supposed, in consequence, shallower, though it ran furiously.

"It doesn't look encouraging, and we have no more food left than will take us back to the sloop if we're economical. Do you think it's worth while going on?"

"I haven't a doubt about it," Vane declared. "We ought to reach the head of the valley and get back here in two or three days."

Carroll fancied they could have walked the distance in a few hours on a graded road; but the roughness of the ground was not the chief difficulty.

"Three days will make a big hole in the provisions," he pointed out.

"Then we'll have to put up with short rations."

Carroll nodded in rueful acquiescence.

"If you're determined, we may as well get on."

He stepped cautiously over the edge of the descent, and went down a few yards with a run, while loosened soil and stones slipped away under him. Then he clutched a slender tree, and proceeded as far as the next on his hands and knees. After that it was necessary to swing himself over a ledge, and he alighted safely on one below, from which he could scramble down to the narrow strip of gravel between rock and water. He was standing, breathless, looking at the latter, when Vane joined him. The stones dipped sharply, and two or three large boulders, ringed about with froth, rose near the middle of the stream, which seemed to be running slacker on the other side of them.

There was nothing to show how deep it was, and Carroll did not relish the idea of being compelled to swim burdened with his pack. No trees grew immediately upon the brink of the chasm, and to chop a good-sized log and get it down to the water, in order to ferry themselves across on it, would cost more time than Vane was likely to spare for the purpose. Seeing no other way out of it, Carroll braced himself for an effort and sturdily plunged in.

Two steps took him up to the waist, and he had trouble in finding solid bottom at the next, for the gravel rolled and slipped away beneath his feet in the strong stream. The current dragged hard at his limbs, and he set his lips tight when it crept up to his

ribs. Then he lost his footing, and was washed away, plunging and floundering, with now and then one toe resting momentarily upon the bottom. Sweeping rapidly down the stream he was hurled against the first of the boulders with a crash that almost drove the little remaining breath out of his body. He clung to it desperately, gasping hard; then, with a determined struggle, he contrived to reach the second stone, but the stream pressed him violently against this and he was unable to find any support for his feet. A moment later Vane was washed down toward him and, grabbing at the boulder, held on by it. They said nothing to each other, but they looked at the sliding water between them and the opposite bank. Carroll was getting dangerously cold, and he felt the power ebbing out of him. He realized that if he must swim across he would better do it at once.

Launching himself forward, he felt the flood lap his breast, but as his arms went in he struck something with his knee and found that he could stand on a submerged ledge. This carried him a yard or two, but the next moment he had stepped suddenly over the end of the ledge into deeper water. Floundering forward, he staggered up a strip of shelving shingle and lay there, breathless, waiting for Vane; then together they scrambled up the slope ahead. The work warmed them slightly, and they needed it; but as they strode on again, keeping to the foot of the hillside, where the timber was less dense, a cold rain drove into their faces. It grew steadily thicker; the straps began to gall their wet shoulders, and their saturated clothing clung heavily about their limbs. In spite of this, they struggled on until nightfall, when with dif-

ficulty they made a fire and, after a reduced supper, found a little humid warmth in their wet blankets.

The next day's work was much the same, only that they crossed no rivers. It rained harder, however, and when evening came Carroll, who had burst one boot, was limping badly. They made camp among the dripping firs which partly sheltered them from the bitter wind, and shortly after their meager supper Carroll fell asleep. Vane, to his annoyance, found that he could not follow his friend's example. He was overstrung, and the knowledge that the morrow would show whether the spruce he sought grew in that valley made him restless. The flap of the tent was flung back and resting on one elbow he looked out upon shadowy ranks of trunks, which rose out of the gloom and vanished again as the firelight grew and sank. He could smell the acrid smoke and could hear the splash of heavy drops upon the saturated soil, while the hoarse roar of the river came up in fitful cadence from the depths of the valley.

In place of being deadened by fatigue, his imagination seemed quickened and set free. It carried him back to the lonely heights and the rugged dales of his own land, and once more in vivid memory he roamed the upland heath with Evelyn. She had attracted him strongly when he was in her visible presence; but now he thought he understood her better than he had ever done then. He had, he felt, not grasped the inner meaning of much that she said. Words might convey but little in their literal sense and yet give to a sympathetic listener an insight into the depths of the speaker's nature, or hint at a thought too finely spun and delicate for formal expression.

The same thing applied to her physical personality. Contours, coloring, features, were things that could be defined and appraised; but there was besides, in Evelyn's case, an aura that only now and then could dimly be perceived by senses attuned to it. It enveloped her in a mystic light. Again he remembered how he had sought her with crude longing and cold appreciation. He had failed to comprehend her; the one creditable thing he had done was the renouncing of his claim. Then the half-formed idea grew plainer that she would understand and sympathize with what he was doing now. It was to keep faith with those who trusted him that he meant stubbornly to prosecute his search and, if the present journey failed, to come back again. That Evelyn would ever hear of his undertaking, appeared most improbable; but this did not matter. He knew now that it was the remembrance of her that had largely animated him to make the venture; and to go on in the face of all opposing difficulties was something he could do in her honor. Then by degrees his eyes grew heavy, and when he sank down in his wet blankets sleep came to him. Perhaps he had been fanciful — he was undoubtedly overstrung — but, through such dreams as he indulged in, passing glimpses of strange and splendid visions that transfigure the toil and clamor of a material world are now and then granted to wayfaring men.

At noon the next day they reached the head of the valley. It was still raining, and heavy mists obscured the summits of the hills, but above the lower slopes of rock glimmering snow ran up into the

woolly vapor. There were firs, a few balsams and hemlocks, but no sign of a spruce.

"Now," Carroll commented dryly, "perhaps you'll be satisfied."

Vane smiled. He was no nearer to owning himself defeated than he had been when they first set out.

"We know there's no spruce in this valley — and that's something," he replied. "When we come back again we'll try the next one."

"It has cost us a good deal to make sure of the fact."

Vane's expression changed.

"We haven't ascertained the cost just yet. As a rule, you don't make up the bill until you're through with the undertaking; and it may be a longer one than either of us think. Well, we might as well turn upon our tracks."

Carroll recalled this speech afterward. Just then, however, he hitched his burden a little higher on his aching shoulders as he plodded after his comrade down the rain-swept hollow. They had good cause to remember the march to the inlet. It rained most of the while and their clothes were never dry; parts of them, indeed, flowed in tatters about their aching limbs, and before they had covered half the distance, their boots were dropping to pieces. What was more important, their provisions were rapidly running out, and they marched on a few handfuls of food, carefully apportioned, twice daily. At last they lay down hungry, with empty bags, one night, to sleep shelterless in the rain, for they had thrown their tent away.

Carroll had some difficulty in getting on his feet the next morning.

"I believe I can hold out until sundown, though I'm far from sure of it," he said. "You'll have to leave me behind if we don't strike the inlet then."

"We'll strike it in the afternoon," Vane assured him.

They reslung their packs and set out wearily. Carroll, limping and stumbling along, was soon troubled by a distressful stitch in his side. He managed to keep pace with Vane, however, and some time after noon a twinkling gleam among the trees caught their eye. Then the shuffling pace grew faster, and they were breathless when at last they stopped and dropped their burdens beside the boat. It was only at the third or fourth attempt that they got her down to the water, and the veins were swollen high on Vane's flushed forehead when he sat down, panting heavily, on her gunwale.

"We ran her up quite easily, though we had the slope to face then," he remarked.

"You could scarcely expect to carry boats about without trouble after a march like the one we've made!"

They ran her in and pulled off to the sloop. When at last they sat down in the little saloon, Vane got a glimpse of himself in the mirror.

"I knew you looked a deadbeat," he laughed, "but I'd no idea I was quite so bad. Anyhow, we'll get the stove lighted and some dry things on. The next question is — what shall we have for supper?"

"That's easy. Everything that's most tempting, and the whole of it."

Shortly afterward they flung their boots and rent garments overboard and sat down to a feast. The plates were empty when they rose, and in another hour both of them were wrapped in heavy slumber.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### JESSY CONFERS A FAVOR

THE next morning it was blowing fresh from the southeast, which was right ahead, and Vane's face was hard when he and Carroll got the boat on deck and set about tying down two reefs in the mainsail.

"Bad luck seems to follow us," he grumbled.

Carroll smiled.

"There's no doubt of that; but I suppose the fact won't have much effect on you."

"No," returned Vane decidedly. "We had our troubles in other ventures, and somehow we got over them — I don't see why we shouldn't do the same again. Now that we've seen the country, we ought to get some useful information out of Hartley — we'll know what to ask him."

"I shouldn't count too much on his help," Carroll answered with a thoughtful air.

They got sail upon the sloop and drove her out into a confused head sea, through which she labored with flooded decks, making very little to windward. When night came, a deluge killed the breeze, and the next day she lay rolling wildly in a heavy calm while light mist narrowed in the horizon and a persistent drizzle poured down upon the smoothly heaving sea. Then they had light variable winds, and their provisions

were once more running out when they drew abreast of a little coaling port. Carroll suggested running in and going on to Victoria by train, but they had hardly decided to do so when the fickle breeze died away and the tide-stream bore them past to the south. They had no longer a stitch of dry clothing and they were again upon reduced rations.

Still bad fortune dogged them, for that night a fresh head wind sprang up and held steadily while they thrashed her south, swept by stinging spray. Their tempers grew shorter under the strain, and their bodies ached from the chill of their sodden garments and from sitting hour by hour at the helm. At last the breeze fell, and shortly afterward a trail of smoke and a half-seen strip of hull emerged from the creeping haze astern of them.

"A lumber tug," observed Vane. "She seems to have a raft in tow, and it will probably be for Drayton's people. If you'll edge in toward her I'll send him word that we're on the way."

There was very little wind just then and presently the tug was close alongside, pitching her bows out of the slow swell, while a great mass of timber wonderfully chained together surged along astern, the dim, slate-green sea washing over it. A shapeless oil-skinned figure stood outside her pilot-house, balancing itself against the heave of the bridge, which slanted and straightened.

"Winstanley?" Vane shouted.

The figure waved an arm, as if in assent, and Vane raised his voice again.

"Report us to Mr. Drayton. We'll come along as fast as we can."

The man turned and pointed to the misty horizon astern.

"You'll get it from the north before to-morrow!" he called.

Then the straining tug and the long wet line of working raft drew ahead while the sloop crawled on, close-hauled toward the south. Late that night, however, the mist melted away, and a keen rushing breeze that came out of the north crisped the water. The vessel sprang forward when the ripples reached her; the flapping canvas went to sleep; and while each slack rope tightened a musical tinkle broke out at the bows. It grew steadily louder, and when the sun swung up red above the eastern hills, she had piled the white froth to her channels and was driving forward merrily with little sparkling seas tumbling, foam-tipped, after her. The wind fell light as the sun rose higher, but the swinging sloop ran on all day, with blurred hills and forests sliding past; and the western sky was still blazing with a wondrous green when she stole into Vancouver harbor.

Carroll gazed at the city with open appreciation. It rose, girded with many wires and giant telegraph poles, roof above roof, up a low rise, on the crest of which towering pines still lifted their ragged spires against the evening sky. Lower down, big white lights were beginning to blink, and the forests up the inlet beyond the smoke of the mills had already faded to a belt of shadow.

"Quebec," he remarked, "looks fine from the river, clustering round and perched upon its heights; and Montreal at the foot of its mountain strikes your eye from most points of view; but I can't remember ever

entering either with the pleasure I've experienced in reaching this city."

"You probably arrived at the others traveling in a Pullman or in a luxurious side-wheel steamboat. It wouldn't be any great change from them to a smart hotel."

"That may explain the thing," Carroll agreed with an air of humorous reflection. "I guess the way you regard a city depends largely on the condition you're in when you reach it and on what you expect to get out of it. In the present case, Vancouver stands for rest and comfort and enough to eat."

Vane laughed.

"I'm as glad to be back as you are; but you'd better make the most of any leisure that you can get. As soon as I've arranged things here we'll go north again."

The light faded as they crept across the inlet before a faint breeze, but when they got the anchor over and the boat into the water, Carroll made out two dim figures standing on the wharf.

"It's Drayton, I think," he said, waving a hand to them. "Kitty's with him."

They pulled ashore, and Drayton and Kitty greeted them.

"I've been looking out for you since noon," Drayton told them. "What about the spruce?"

There was eagerness in his voice, and Vane's face clouded.

"We couldn't find a trace of it."

Drayton's disappointment was obvious, though he tried to hide it.

"Well," he said resignedly, "I've no doubt you did all you could."

"Of course!" Kitty broke in. "We're quite sure of that!"

Vane thanked her with a glance. He felt sorry for her and Drayton. They were strongly attached to each other, and he had reasons for believing that even with the advanced salary the man expected to get they would find it needful to study strict economy. It was easy to understand that a small share in a prosperous enterprise would have made things easier for them.

"I'm going to make another attempt. I expect some of our difficulties will vanish after I've had a talk with Hartley."

"That's impossible," Kitty explained softly. "Hartley died a week ago."

Vane started. The prospector had given him very little definite information, and it was disconcerting to recognize that he must now rely entirely upon his own devices.

"I'm sorry," he said. "How's Celia?"

"She's very ill." There was concern in Kitty's voice. "Hartley got worse soon after you left, and she sat up all night with him, after her work for the last few weeks. Now she's broken down, and she seems to worry for fear they will not take her back again at the hotel."

"I must go to see her," declared Vane. "But won't you and Drayton come with us and have dinner?"

Drayton explained that this was out of the question; Kitty's employer, who had driven in that afternoon, was waiting with his team. They left the wharf together, and a few minutes later Vane shook hands with the girl and her companion.

"Don't lose heart," he said encouragingly. "We're far from beaten yet."

Some time afterward Vane, rejoicing in the unusual luxury of clean, dry clothes, walked across to call on Nairn. The house struck him as larger, more commodious and better lighted than it had been when he left it, although he supposed that was only the result of his having lived on board the sloop and in the bush. He was shown into a room where Jessy Horsfield was sitting, and she rose with a slight start when he came in; but her manner was reposeful and quietly friendly when she held out her hand.

"So you have come back! Have you succeeded in your search?"

Vane was gratified. It was pleasant to feel that she was interested in his undertaking.

"No," he confessed. "For the time being, I'm afraid I have failed."

There was reproach in Jessy's voice when she answered.

"Then you have disappointed me!"

It was delicate flattery, as she had conveyed the impression that she had expected him to succeed, which implied that she held a high opinion of his abilities. Still, she did not mean him to think that he had forfeited the latter.

"After all, you must have had a good deal against you," she added consolingly. "Won't you sit down and tell me about it? Mr. Nairn, I understand, is writing some letters, and he sent for Mrs. Nairn just before you came in. I don't suppose she will be back for a few minutes."

She indicated a chair beside the open hearth and

Vane sat down opposite her, where a low screen cut them off from the rest of the room. A shaded lamp above their heads cast down a soft radiance which lighted a sparkle in the girl's hair, and a red, wood fire glowed cheerfully in front of them. Vane, still stiff and aching from exposure to the cold and rain, reveled in the unusual sense of comfort. In addition to this, his companion's pose was singularly graceful, and the ease of it and the friendly smile with which she regarded him somehow implied that they were on excellent terms.

"It's very nice to be here again," he said languidly.

Jessy looked up at him. He had, as she recognized, spoken as he felt, on impulse, and this was more gratifying than an obvious desire to pay her a compliment would have been.

"I suppose you didn't get many comforts in the bush," she suggested.

"No. Comforts of any kind are remarkably scarce up yonder. As a matter of fact, I can't imagine a country where the contrasts between the luxuries of civilization and — the other thing — are sharper. You can step off a first-class car into the wilderness, where no amount of money can buy you better fare than pork, potatoes and dried apples; and if you want to travel you must shoulder your pack and walk. But that wasn't exactly what I meant."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I don't know that it's worth explaining. We have rather luxurious quarters at the hotel, but this room is somehow different. It's restful — I think it's homely — in fact, as I said, it's nice to be here."

Jessy made no comment. She understood that he

had been attempting to analyze his feelings, and had failed clearly to recognize that her presence contributed to the satisfaction of which he was conscious. She had no doubt that if he were a man of average susceptibility, which seemed to be the case, the company of a well-dressed and attractive woman would have some effect on him after his sojourn in the wilds; but whether she had produced any deeper effect than that or not she could not determine. Though she was curious upon the point, it did not appear judicious to prompt him unduly.

"But won't you tell me your adventures?" she begged.

It required a few leading questions to start him, but at length he told the story in a manner that compelled her interest.

"You see," he concluded, "it was the lack of definite knowledge as much as the natural obstacles that brought us back — and I've been troubled about the thing since we landed."

Jessy's manner invited his confidence.

"I wonder," she said softly, "if you would care to tell me why?"

Vane knit his brows.

"Hartley's dead, and I understand that his daughter has broken down after nursing him. It's doubtful whether her situation can be kept open, and it may be some time before she's strong enough to look for another." He hesitated. "In a way, I feel responsible for her."

"You really aren't responsible in the least," Jessy declared. "Still, I can understand the idea's troubling you."

"She's left without a cent and unable to work — and I don't know what to do. In an affair of this kind I'm handicapped by being a man."

"Would you like me to help you?"

"I can hardly ask it, but it would be a relief to me," Vane answered with obvious eagerness.

"Then if you'll tell me her address, I'll go to see her, and we'll consider what can be done."

Vane leaned forward impulsively.

"You have taken a weight off my mind. It's difficult to thank you properly."

"Oh, I don't suppose it will give me any trouble. Of course, it must be embarrassing to you to feel that you have a helpless young woman on your hands."

Then a thought flashed into her mind, as she remembered what she had seen at the station some months ago.

"I wonder whether the situation is an altogether unusual one to you?" she queried. "Have you never let your pity run away with your judgment before?"

"You wouldn't expect me to proclaim my charities," Vane parried with a laugh.

"I think you are trying to put me off. You haven't given me an answer."

"Well, perhaps I was able to make things easier for somebody else not very long ago," Vane confessed reluctantly but without embarrassment. "I now see that I might have done harm without meaning to do so. It's sometimes extraordinarily difficult to help people — and that makes me especially grateful for your offer."

For the next few moments Jessy sat silent. It was

clear that she had misjudged him, for although she was not one who demanded too much from human nature, the fact that Kitty Blake had arrived in Vancouver in his company had undoubtedly rankled in her mind. Now she acquitted him of any blame, and it was a relief to do so. She changed the subject abruptly.

"I suppose you will make another attempt to find the timber?"

"Yes. In a week or two."

He had hardly spoken when Mrs. Nairn came in and welcomed him with her usual friendliness.

"I'm glad to see ye, though ye're looking thin," she said. "What's the way ye did not come straight to us, instead of going to the hotel. Ye would have got as good a supper as they would give ye there."

"I haven't a doubt of it," Vane declared. "On the other hand, I hardly think that even one of your suppers would quite have put right the defect in my appearance you mentioned. You see, the cause of it has been at work for some time."

Mrs. Nairn regarded him with half-amused compassion.

"If ye'll come over every evening, we'll soon cure that. I would have been down sooner if Alic had not kept me. He's writing letters, and there was a matter or two he wanted to ask my opinion on."

"I think that was very wise of him," Vane commented.

His hostess smiled.

"For one thing, we had a letter from Evelyn Chisholm this afternoon. She'll be out to spend some time with us in about a month."

"Evelyn's coming here?" Vane exclaimed, with a sudden stirring of his heart.

"Why should she no? I told ye some time ago that we partly expected her. Ye were no astonished then."

She appeared to expect an explanation of the change in his attitude, and as he volunteered none she drew him a few paces aside.

"If I'm no betraying a confidence, Evelyn writes — I'm no sure of the exact words — that she'll be glad to get away a while. Now, I've been wondering why she should be anxious to leave home?"

She looked at him fixedly, and, to his annoyance, he felt his face grow hot. Mrs. Nairn had quick perceptions, and now and then she was painfully direct.

"It struck me that Evelyn was not very comfortable there," he replied. "She seemed out of harmony with her people — she didn't belong. The same thing," he went on lamely, "applies to Mopsy."

Mrs. Nairn glanced at him with a twinkle in her eyes.

"It's no unlikely. The reason may serve — for the want of a better." Then she changed her tone. "Ye'll away up to Alic; he told me to send ye."

Vane went out of the room, but he left Jessy in a thoughtful mood. She had seen his start at the mention of Evelyn, and it struck her as significant, for she had heard that he had spent some time with the Chisholms. On the other hand, there was the obvious fact that he had been astonished to hear that Evelyn was coming out, which implied that their acquaintance had not progressed far enough to warrant the girl's informing him. Besides, Evelyn would not arrive

for a month; and Jessy reflected that she would probably see a good deal of Vane in the meanwhile. She now felt glad that she had promised to look after Celia Hartley, for that, no doubt, would necessitate her consulting with him every now and then. She endeavored to dismiss the matter from her mind, however, and exerted herself to interest Mrs. Nairn in a description of a function she had lately attended.

## CHAPTER XIX

### VANE FORESEES TROUBLE

NAIRN was sitting at a writing-table when Vane entered his room, and after a few questions about his journey he handed the younger man one of the papers that lay in front of him.

"It's a report from the mine. Ye can read and think it over while I finish this letter."

Vane carefully studied the document, and then waited until Nairn laid down his pen.

"It only brings us back to our last conversation on the subject," he said when his host glanced at him inquiringly. "We have the choice of going on as we are doing, or extending our operations by an increase of capital. In the latter case, our total earnings might be larger, but I hardly believe there would be as good a return on the money actually sunk. Taking it all round, I don't know what to think. Of course, if it appeared that there was a moral certainty of making a satisfactory profit on the new stock, I should consent."

Nairn chuckled.

"A moral certainty is no a very common thing in mining."

"Horsfield's in favor of the scheme. How far would you trust that man?"

"About as far as I could fling a bull by the tail. The same thing applies to both of them."

"He has some influence. No doubt he'd find supporters."

Nairn saw that the meaning of his last remark, which implied that he had no more confidence in Jessy than he had in her brother, had not been grasped by his companion, but he did not consider it judicious to make it plainer. Instead, he gave Vane another piece of information.

"He and Winter work into each other's hands."

"But Winter has no interest in the Clermont!"

Nairn smiled sourly.

"He holds no shares in the mine; but there's no much in the shape of mineral developments yon man has no an interest in. Since ye do no seem inclined to yield Horsfield a point or two, it might pay ye to watch the pair of them."

Vane was aware that Winter was a person of some importance in financial circles, and he sat thoughtfully silent for a couple of minutes.

"Now," he explained at length, "every dollar we have in the Clermont is usefully employed and earning a satisfactory profit. Of course, if we put the concern on the market, we might get more than it is worth from investors; but that doesn't greatly appeal to me."

"It's unnecessary to point out that a director's interest is no invariably the same as that of his shareholders," Nairn rejoined.

"It's an unfortunate fact. Yet I'd be no better off if I got only the same actual return on a larger amount of what would be watered stock."

"There's sense in that. I'm no urging the scheme — there are other points against it."

"Well, I'll go up and look round the mine, and then we'll have another talk about the matter."

Vane walked back to his hotel in a thoughtful frame of mind. Finding Carroll in the smoking-room, he related his conversation with Nairn.

"I'm a little troubled about the situation," he confessed. "The Clermont finances are now on a sound basis, but it might after all prove advantageous to raise further capital; although in such a case we would, perhaps, lie open to attack. Nairn's inclined to be cryptic in his remarks; but he seems to hint that it would be advisable to make Horsfield some concession — in other words, to buy him off."

"Which is a course you have objections to?"

"Very decided ones."

"In a general way, Nairn's advice strikes me as quite sensible. Wherever mining and other schemes are floated, there are men who make a good living out of the operations. They're trained to the business; they've control of the money; and when a new thing's put on the market, they consider they've the first claim on the pickings. As a rule, that notion seems to be justified."

"You needn't elaborate the point," Vane broke in impatiently.

"You made your appearance in this city as a poor and unknown man with a mine to sell," Carroll went on. "Disregarding tactful hints, you laid down your terms and stuck to them. Launching your venture without considering their views, you did the gentlemen I've mentioned out of their accustomed toll, and I've no doubt that some of them were indignant. It's a thing you couldn't expect them to sanction. Now,

however, one who probably has others behind him is making overtures to you. You ought to consider it a compliment; a recognition of ability. The question is — do you mean to slight these advances and go on as you have begun?"

"That's my present intention," Vane answered.

"Then you needn't be astonished if you find yourself up against a determined opposition."

"I think my friends will stand by me."

Vane looked at him steadily, and Carroll laughed.

"Thanks. I've merely been pointing out what you may expect, and hinting at the most judicious course — though the latter's rather against my natural inclinations. I'd better add that I've never been particularly prudent, and the opposite policy appeals to me. If we're forced to clear for action, we'll nail the flag to the mast."

It was spoken lightly, because the man was serious, but Vane knew that he had an ally who would support him with unflinching staunchness.

"I'm far from sure that it will be needful," he replied.

They talked about other matters until they strolled off to their rooms. The next week Vane was kept occupied in the city; and then once more they sailed for the North. They pushed inland until they were stopped by snow among the ranges, without finding the spruce. The journey proved as toilsome as the previous one, and both men were worn out when they reached the coast. Vane was determined on making a third attempt, but he decided to visit the mine before proceeding to Vancouver. They had heavy rain during the voyage down the straits, and when, on

the day after reaching port, the jaded horses they had hired plodded up the sloppy trail to the mine a pitiless deluge poured down on them. The light was growing dim among the dripping firs, and a deep-toned roar came throbbing across their shadowy ranks. Vane turned and glanced back at Carroll.

"I've never heard the river so plainly before," he said. "It must be unusually swollen."

The mine was situated on a narrow level flat between the hillside and the river, and Carroll understood the anxiety in his comrade's voice. Urging the wearied horses they pressed on a little faster. It was almost dark, however, when they reached the edge of an opening in the firs and saw a cluster of iron-roofed, wooden buildings and a tall chimney-stack, in front of which the unsightly ore-dump extended. Wet, chilled and worn out as the men were, there was comfort in the sight; but Vane frowned as he noticed that a shallow lake stretched between him and the buildings. On one side of it there was a broad strip of tumbling foam, which rose and fell in confused upheavals and filled the forest with the roar it made. Vane drove his horse into the water; and dismounting among the stumps before the ore-dump, he found a wet and soil-stained man awaiting him. A long trail of smoke floated away from the iron stack behind him, and through the sound of the river there broke the clank and thud of hard-driven pumps.

"You have got a big head of steam up, Salter," he remarked.

The man nodded.

"We want it. It's a taking me all my time to keep the water out of the workings; and the boys are

over their ankles in the new drift. Leave your horses — I'll send along for them — and I'll show you what we've been doing, after supper."

"I'd rather go now, while I'm wet," Vane answered. "We came straight on as soon as we landed, and I probably shouldn't feel like turning out again when I'd had a meal."

Salter made a sign of assent, and a few minutes later they went down into the mine. The approach to it looked like a canal, and they descended the shallow shaft amid a thin cascade. The tunnel slanted, for the lode dipped, and the pale lights that twinkled here and there among the timbering showed shadowy, half-naked figures toiling in water which rose well up their boots. Further streams of it ran in from fissures; and Vane's face grew grave as he plodded through the flood with a lamp in his hand. He spent an hour in the workings, asking Salter a question now and then, and afterward went back with him to one of the iron-roofed sheds, where he put on dry clothes and sat down to a meal.

When it was over and the table had been cleared, he lay in a canvas chair beside the stove, listening to the resinous billets snapping and crackling cheerfully. The little, brightly lighted room was pleasantly warm, and Vane was filled with a languid sense of physical comfort after long exposure to rain and bitter wind. The deluge roared upon the iron roof; the song of the river rose and fell, filling the place with sound; and now and then the pounding and clanking of the pumps broke in.

Vane examined the sheet of figures Salter handed him, and lighted a fresh cigar when he had laid it

down. Then he carefully turned over some of the pieces of stone which partly covered the table.

"There's no doubt that those specimens aren't quite so promising," he said at length; "and the cost of extraction is going up. I'll have a talk with Nairn when I get back; but in the meanwhile it looks as if we were going to have trouble with the water."

"It's a thing I've been afraid of for some time," Salter answered. "We can keep down any leakage that comes in through the rock, though it means driving the pumps hard, but an inrush from the river would beat us. A rise of a foot or so would turn the flood into the workings." He paused and added significantly: "Drowning out a mine's a costly matter. My idea is that you ought to double our pumping power and cut down the rock in the river-bed near the rapid. That would take off three or four feet of water."

"It would mean a mighty big wages bill."

Salter nodded gravely.

"To do the thing properly would cost a pile of money; but it's an outlay that you'll surely have to face."

Vane let the matter drop, and an hour later retired to his wooden berth. The roar of the rain upon the vibrating roof was like the roll of a great drum, and the sound of the river's turmoil throbbed through the frail wooden shack; but the man had lain down at night near many a rapid and thundering fall, and in a few minutes he was fast asleep. He was awakened by a new shrill note, which he recognized as the whistle of the pumping engine. It was sounding the alarm. The next moment Vane

was struggling into his clothing; then the door swung open and Salter stood in the entrance, lantern in hand, with water trickling from him. There was keen anxiety in his expression.

"Flood's lapping the bank top now!" he gasped. "There's a jam in the narrow place at the head of the rapid and the water's backing up! I'm going along with the boys."

He vanished as suddenly as he had appeared and Vane savagely jerked on his jacket. If the mine were drowned, it would entail a heavy expenditure in pumping plant to clear out the water, and even then operations might be stopped for a considerable time. What was more, it would precipitate a crisis in the affairs of the company and necessitate an increase of its capital.

Vane was outside in less than a minute and stood still, looking about him, while the deluge lashed his face and beat his clothing against his limbs. He could make out only a blurred mass of climbing trees on one side and a strip of foam cutting through the black level, which he supposed was water, in front of him. His trained ears, however, gave him a little information, for the clamor of the flood was broken by a sharp snapping and crashing which he knew was made by a mass of driftwood driving furiously against the boulders. In that region, the river banks are encumbered here and there with great logs, partly burned by forest fires, reaped by gales or brought down from the hillsides by falls of frost-loosened soil. A flood higher than usual sets them floating, and on subsiding sometimes leaves them packed in a gorge or stranded in a shallow to wait for the next

big rise. Now they were driving down and, as Salter had said, jamming at the head of the rapid.

Suddenly a column of fierce white radiance leaped up, lower down-stream, and Vane knew that a big compressed air-lamp had been carried to the spot where the driftwood was gathering. Even at a distance, the brightness of the blaze dazzled him, and he could see nothing else when he headed toward it. He stumbled against a fir stump, and the next minute the splashing about his feet warned him that he was entering the water. Having no wish to walk into the main stream, he floundered to one side. Getting nearer to the blaze, he soon made out a swarm of shadowy figures scurrying about beneath it. Some of them had saws or axes, for he caught the gleam of steel. He broke into a splashing run; and presently Carroll, whom he had forgotten, came up calling to him.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE FLOOD

WHEN he reached the blast-lamp, which was raised on a tall tripod, Vane stood with his back to the pulsating gaze while he grasped the details of a somewhat impressive scene. A little upstream of him, the river leaped out of the darkness, breaking into foaming waves, and a wall of dripping firs flung back the roar it made, the first rows of serried trunks standing out hard and sharp in the fierce white light. Nearer the spot where he stood, a projecting spur of rock narrowed in the river, which boiled tumultuously against its foot, while about halfway across, the top of a giant boulder rose above the flood.

Vane could just see it, because a mass of driftwood, which was momentarily growing, stretched from bank to bank. A big log, drifting down sidewise, had brought up against the boulder and once fixed had seized and held fast each succeeding trunk. Some had been driven partly out upon those that had preceded them; some had been drawn beneath and catching the bottom had jammed; then the rest had been wedged by the current into the gathering mass, trunks, branches and brushwood all finding a place. When the stream is strong, a jam usually extends downward, as well as rises, as the water it pens back increases in

depth, until it forms an almost solid barrier from surface to bed. If it occurs during a log-drive the river is choked with valuable lumber.

Bent figures were at work with handspikes and axes at the shoreward end of the mass; others had crawled out along the logs in search of another point where they could advantageously be attacked; but Vane, watching them with practised eye, decided that they were largely throwing their toil away. Then he glanced down-stream; but, powerful as the light was, it did not pierce far into the darkness and the rain, and the mad white rush of the rapid vanished abruptly into the surrounding gloom. He caught the clink of a hammer on a drill, and seeing Salter not far away, he strode toward him.

"How are you getting to work?" he asked.

Salter pointed to the foot of the rock on which they stood.

"I reckoned that if we could put a shot in yonder we might cut out stone enough to clear the butts of the larger logs that are keying up the jam."

"You're wasting time — starting at the wrong place."

"It's possible; but what am I to do? I'd rather split that boulder or chop down to the king log there — but the boys can't get across."

"Have they tried?" Vane demanded. "I will, if it's necessary."

Salter expostulated.

"I want to point out that you're the boss director of this company. I don't know what you're making out of it; but you can hire men to do that kind of work for three dollars a day."

"We'll let the boys try it, if they're willing."

Vane raised his voice.

"Are any of you open to earn twenty dollars? I'll pay that to the man who'll put a stick of giant-powder in yonder boulder, and another twenty to any one who can find the king log and chop it through."

Three or four of them crept cautiously along the driftwood bridge. It heaved and worked beneath them; the foam sluiced across it and the stream forced the thinner tops of shattered trees above the barrier. It was obvious that the men were risking life and limb, and there was a cry from the others when one of them went down and momentarily disappeared. He scrambled to his feet again, but those behind him stopped, bracing themselves against the stream, nearly waist-deep in rushing froth. Most of them had followed rough and dangerous occupations in the bush; but they were not professional river-Jacks trained to high proficiency in log-driving, and one of them, turning, shouted to the watchers on the bank.

"This jam's not solid!" he explained above the roar of the water. "She's working open and shutting; and you can't tell where the breaks are."

He stooped and rubbed his leg, and Vane understood him to add:

"Figured I had it smashed."

Vane swung round toward Carroll.

"We'll give them a lead!"

Salter ventured another expostulation:

"Stay where you are! How are you going to manage, if the boys can't tackle the thing?"

"They haven't as much at stake as I have," was Vane's reply. "I'm a director of the company, as you

pointed out. Give me two sticks of giant-powder, some fuse, and detonators!"

Salter yielded when he saw that Vane meant to be obeyed; and cramming the blasting material into his pocket, Vane turned to Carroll.

"Are you coming with me?"

"Since I can't stop you, I suppose I'd better go."

As they sprang down the bank, Salter addressed one of the miners at work near him.

"I've seen a few company bosses in my time, but this one's different from the rest. I can't imagine any of the others wanting to cross that jam."

Vane crawled out on the groaning timber, with Carroll a few feet behind him. The perilous bridge they traversed rolled beneath their feet; but they had joined the other men before they came to any particularly troublesome opening. Then the clustering wet figures were brought up by a gap filled with leaping foam, in the midst of which brushwood swung to and fro and projecting branches ground on one another. Whether there was solid timber a foot or two beneath, or only the entrance to some cavity by which the stream swept through the barrier, there was nothing to show; but Vane set his lips and leaped. He alighted on something that bore him, and when the others followed, floundering and splashing, the deliberation which hitherto had characterized their movements suddenly deserted them. They had reached the limit beyond which it was no longer needful.

There is courage which springs from knowledge, often painfully acquired, of the threatened dangers and the best means of avoiding them; but it carries its possessor only so far. Beyond that point he must face

the risk he cannot estimate and blindly trust to chance. At sea, when canvas is still the propelling power, and in the wilderness, man at grips with the elemental forces must now and then rise above bodily shrinking and disregard the warnings of reason. There are tasks which cannot be undertaken in cold blood; and when they had crossed the gap, Vane and those behind him blundered on in hot Berserker fury. They had risen to the demand on them, and the curious psychic change had come; now they must achieve success or face annihilation. But in this there was nothing unusual; it is the alternative offered many a log-driver, miner and sailorman.

Neither Vane nor Carroll, nor any of those who assisted them, had a clear recollection of what they did. Somehow they reached the boulder; somehow they plied ax or iron-hooked peevy, while the unstable, foam-lapped platform rocked beneath their feet. Every movement entailed a peril no one could calculate; but they toiled savagely on. When Vane began to swing a hammer above a drill, or from whom he got it, he did not know, any more than he remembered when he had torn off and thrown away his jacket although the sticks of giant-powder which had been in his pocket lay near him upon the stone. Sparks leaped from the drill which Carroll held and fell among the coils of snaky fuse; but that did not trouble them; and it was only when Vane was breathless that he changed places with his companion. They heard neither the turmoil of the flood nor the crashing of the timber, and the foam that lapped their long boots whirled unheeded by.

About them, bowed figures that breathed in ster-

torous gasps grappled desperately with the grinding, smashing timber. Sometimes they were forced up in harsh distinctness by a dazzling glare; sometimes they faded into blurred shadows as the pulsating flame upon the bank sank a little or was momentarily blown aside; but all the while gorged veins rose on bronzed foreheads and toil-hardened muscles were taxed to the utmost. At last, when a trunk rolled beneath him, Carroll missed a stroke and realized with a shock of dismay that it was not the drill he had struck with his hammer.

"I couldn't help it!" he gasped. "Where did I hit you?"

"Get on!" Vane cried hoarsely. "I can hold the drill."

Carroll struck for a few more minutes, and then flung down the hammer and inserted the giant-powder into the holes sunk in the stone. He lighted the fuse and, warning the others, they hastily recrossed the dangerous bridge. They had reached the edge of the forest when a flash leaped up amid the foam and a sharp crash was followed by a deafening, drawn-out uproar. Rending, grinding, smashing, the jam broke up. It hammered upon the partly shattered boulder, and, carrying it away or driving over it, washed in tremendous ruin down the rapid. When the wild clamor had subsided, Salter gave the men some instructions; and then, as they approached the lamp, he noticed Vane's reddened hand.

"That looks a nasty smash; you want to get it seen to," he advised.

"I'll get it dressed at the settlement; we'll make an early start to-morrow. We were lucky in breaking

the jam; but you'll have the same trouble over again any time a heavy flood brings down an unusual quantity of driftwood."

"It's what I'd expect."

"Then something will have to be done to prevent it. I'll go into the matter when I reach the city."

Carroll and Vane walked back to the shack, where the latter bound up his comrade's injured hand. When he had done so, Vane managed to light a cigar, and lying back, still very wet, he looked thoughtful.

"We can't risk having the workings drowned; but I'm afraid the cost of the remedy will force me into sanctioning some scheme for increasing our capital."

"It's a very common procedure," Carroll rejoined. "I've wondered why you had so strong an objection to it. Of course, I've heard your business reasons."

Vane smiled.

"I have some of a different kind — we'll call them sentimental ones — though I don't think I quite realized it until lately."

"You're not given to introspection. Go on; I think I know what's coming."

"To put the thing into words may help me to formulate my ideas; they're rather hazy. Well, ostensibly, I left England as the result of a difference of opinion — which I've regretted ever since — though I know now that really it was from another cause. I wanted room, I wanted freedom; and I got them both — freedom either to do work that nearly broke my heart and wore the flesh off me or to starve."

"The experience is not an unusual one."

"Eventually," Vane proceeded, "I managed to get on my feet. I suppose I got rather proud of myself

when I beat the city men over the floating of the mine, and I began to think of going back to the sphere of life in which I was born — excuse the phrase."

"It looked nice, from a distance," Carroll suggested.

"It was tolerable in Vancouver; anyway, while I could go straight ahead and interest myself in the development of the mine. I began to expect a good deal from my English visit."

Carroll laughed softly before he helped him out.

"And you were bitterly disappointed. It's a very old tale. You had cut loose — and you couldn't get back when you wanted to."

"I suppose I'd changed; the bush had got hold of me. The ways and views of the people over yonder didn't seem to be those I remembered. They couldn't look at things from my standpoint; I wouldn't adopt theirs. You and I have had to face — realities."

"Hunger," corrected Carroll softly; "wet snow to sleep in; bodily exhaustion. They probably teach one something, or, at any rate, they alter one's point of view. When you've marched for days on half rations, some things don't seem so important — how you put on your clothes, for instance, or how your dinner's served. But I don't see yet what bearing this has on your reluctance to extend the Clermont operations."

"I could act as director, with such men as Nairn, when it was a question of running a mine; but it's doubtful if I'd make a successful financial juggler. It's hard to keep one's hands off some of the professional tricksters. Bluff, assumption, make-believe — Pshaw! I've had enough of them. Better stick to the ax and cross-cut; that's what I feel to-night."

"Now that you've relieved your mind, I'll show you

where you were wrong. You said that you had changed in the wilderness — you haven't; your kind are fore-loopers born. Your place is with the vedettes, ahead of the massed columns. But there's a point that strikes one — is your objection to financial scheming due to honesty or pride?"

Vane laughed.

"I suspect a good deal of it's bad temper. Anyhow, I've felt that rather than truckle with that fellow Horsfield I'd like to pitch him down the stairs. But all this is pretty random talk."

"It is," Carroll agreed. "You haven't said whether you intend to authorize that extension of capital?"

"I suppose it will have to be done. And now it's very late and I'm going to sleep."

They retired to the wooden bunks Salter had placed at their disposal; and early the next morning they left the mine. Vane got his hand dressed when they reached the little mining town at the head of the railroad, and on the following day they arrived in Vancouver.

## CHAPTER XXI

### VANE YIELDS A POINT

THE short afternoon was drawing toward its close when Vane came out of a large building in the city. Glancing at his watch, he stopped on the steps.

"The meeting went pretty satisfactorily, taking it all round," he remarked to Carroll.

"I think so," agreed his companion. "But I'm far from sure that Horsfield was pleased with the stockholders' decision."

Vane smiled in a thoughtful manner. After returning from the mine, he had gone inland to examine a new irrigation property in which he had been asked to take an interest, and had got back only in time for a meeting of the Clermont shareholders, which Nairn had arranged in his absence. The meeting, of the kind that is sometimes correctly described as extraordinary, was just over, and though Vane had been forced to yield to a majority on some points, he had secured the abandonment of a proposition he considered dangerous.

"Though I don't see what the man could have gained by it, I'm inclined to believe that if Nairn and I had been absent he'd have carried his total reconstruction scheme. That wouldn't have pleased me."

"I thought it injudicious."

"It was only because we must raise more money that I agreed to the issue of the new block of shares,"

Vane went on. "We ought to pay a fair dividend on the moderate sum in question."

"You think you'll get it?"

"I've not much doubt."

Carroll made no reply to this. Vane was capable and forceful; but his abilities were of a practical rather than a diplomatic order, and he was occasionally addicted to somewhat headstrong action. Knowing that he had a very cunning antagonist intriguing against him, his companion had misgivings.

"Shall we walk back to the hotel?" he suggested.

"No," answered Vane; "I'll go across and see how Celia Hartley's getting on. I'm afraid I've been forgetting her."

"Then I'll come too. You may need me; there are matters which you're not to be trusted to deal with alone."

Just then Nairn came down the steps and waved his hand to them.

"Ye will no forget that Mrs. Nairn is expecting both of ye this evening."

He passed on, and they set off together across the city toward the district where Celia lived. Though the quarter in question may have been improved out of existence since, a few years ago rows of low-rented shacks stood upon mounds of sweating sawdust which had been dumped into a swampy hollow. Leaky, frail and fissured, they were not the kind of places anyone who could help it would choose to live in; but Vane found the sick girl still installed in one of the worst of them. She looked pale and haggard; but she was busily at work upon some millinery; and the light of a tin lamp showed Drayton and Kitty Blake sitting near

her. There were cracks in the thin, boarded walls, from which a faint resinous odor exuded, but it failed to hide the sour smell of the wet sawdust upon which the shack was built. The room, which was almost bare of furniture, felt damp and unwholesome.

"You oughtn't to be at work; you don't look fit," Vane said to Celia. He paused a moment, hesitating, before he added: "I'm sorry we couldn't find that spruce; but, as I told Drayton, we're going back to try again."

The girl smiled bravely.

"Then you'll find it the next time. I'm glad I'm able to do a little; it brings in a few dollars."

"But what are you doing?"

"Making hats. I did one for Miss Horsfield, and afterward some friends of hers sent me two or three more to trim. She said she'd try to get me work from one of the big stores."

"But you're not a milliner, are you?" asked Vane, feeling grateful to Jessy for the practical way in which she had kept her promise to assist.

"Celia's something better," Kitty broke in. "She's a genius."

"Isn't that a slight on the profession?" Vane laughed.

He was anxious to lead the conversation away from Miss Horsfield's action; he shrank from figuring as the benefactor who had prompted her.

"I'm not quite sure," he continued, "what genius really is."

"I don't altogether agree with the definition of it as the capacity for taking infinite pains," Carroll, guessing his companion's thoughts, remarked with mock

sententiousness. "In Miss Hartley's case, it strikes me as the instinctive ability to evolve a finished work of art from a few fripperies, without the aid of technical training. Give her two or three feathers, a yard of ribbon and a handful of mixed sundries, and she'll magically transmute them into — this."

He took up a hat from the table and surveyed it with an air of critical intelligence.

"It was innate genius that set this plume at the one artistic angle. Had it been done by less capable hands, the thing would have looked like a decorated beehive."

The others laughed, and he led them on to general chatter, under cover of which Vane presently drew Drayton to the door.

"The girl looks far from fit," he said. "Has the doctor been over lately?"

"Two or three days ago," answered Drayton. "We've been worried about Celia. It's out of the question that she should go back to the hotel, and she can only manage to work a few hours daily. There's another thing — the clerk of the fellow who owns these shacks has just been along for his rent. It's overdue."

"Where's he now?"

Drayton laughed, for the sounds of a vigorous altercation rose from farther up the unlighted street.

"I guess he's yonder, having some more trouble with his collecting."

"I'll fix that matter, anyway."

Vane disappeared into the darkness, and it was some time later when he re-entered the shack. He waited until a remark of Celia's gave him a lead.

"You're really a partner in the lumber scheme," he told her; "I can't see why you shouldn't draw part of your share in the proceeds beforehand."

"The first payment isn't to be made until you find the spruce and get your lease," the girl reminded him. "You've already paid a hundred dollars that we had no claim on."

"That doesn't matter; I'm going to find it."

"Yes," agreed Celia, with a look of confidence, "I think you will. But"—a flicker of color crept into her thin face—"I can't take any more money until it is found."

Vane, failing in another attempt to shake her resolution, dropped the subject, and soon afterward he and Carroll took their departure. They were sitting in their hotel, waiting for dinner, when Carroll looked up lazily from his luxurious chair.

"What are you thinking about so hard?" he inquired.

Vane glanced meaningly round the elaborately furnished room.

"There's a contrast between all this and that rotten shack. Did you notice that Celia never stopped sewing while we were there, though she once or twice leaned back rather heavily in her chair?"

"I did. I suppose you're going to propound another conundrum of a kind I've heard before — why you should have so many things you don't particularly need, while Miss Hartley must go on sewing when she's hardly able for it in her most unpleasant shack? I don't know whether the fact that you found a mine answers the question; but if it doesn't the thing's beyond your philosophy."

"Come off!" Vane bade him with signs of impatience. "There are times when your moralizing gets on one's nerves. Anyhow, I straightened out one difficulty — I found the rent man, who'd been round worrying her, and got rid of him."

Carroll groaned in mock dismay, which covered some genuine annoyance with himself; but Vane frowned.

"What's the matter?" he inquired. "Do you want a drink?"

"I'll get over it," Carroll informed him. "It isn't the first time I've suffered from the same complaint. But I'd like to point out that your chivalrous impulses may be the ruin of you some day. Why didn't you let Drayton settle with the man? You gave him a check, I suppose?"

"Sure. I'd only a few loose dollars with me." Vane frowned again. "Now I see what you're driving at; and I want to say that any little reputation I possess can pretty well take care of itself."

"Just so. No doubt it will be necessary; but it doesn't seem to have struck you that you're not the only person concerned."

"It didn't," Vane confessed with a further show of irritation. "But who's likely to hear or take any notice of the thing?"

"I can't tell; but you make enemies as well as friends, and you're walking in slippery places which you're not altogether accustomed to. You can't meet your difficulties with the ax here."

"That's true," assented Vane. "It's rather a pity. Anyhow, I'm not to be scared out of my interest in Celia Hartley."

"What is your interest in her? It's a question that may be asked."

"As you pretend that you don't know, I'll have pleasure in telling you again. When I first struck this city, played out and ragged, she was waitress at a little hotel, and she brought me a double portion of the nicest things at supper. What's more, she sewed up some of my clothes, and I struck a job on the strength of looking comparatively decent. It's the kind of thing you're apt to remember. One doesn't meet with too much kindness in this blamed censorious world."

"I'd expect you to remember," Carroll smiled.

They went in to dinner and when the meal was over they walked across to Nairn's. They were ushered into a room in which several other guests were assembled, and Vane sat down beside Jessy Horsfield. A place on the sofa she occupied was invitingly empty; he did not know, of course, that she had adroitly got rid of her previous companion as soon as he came in.

"I want to thank you; I was over at Miss Hartley's this afternoon," he began.

"I understood that you were at the mining meeting."

"So I was, your brother would tell you that —"

Vane broke off, remembering that he had defeated Horsfield; but Jessy laughed encouragingly.

"He did so — you were opposed to him; but it doesn't follow that I share all his views. Perhaps I ought to be a stauncher partizan."

"If you'll be just to both of us, I'll be satisfied."

Jessy reflected that while this was, no doubt, a commendable sentiment, he might have made a better use

of the opening she had given him by at least hinting that he would value her sympathy.

"I suppose that means that you're convinced of the equity of your cause?" she suggested.

"I dare say I deserve the rebuke; but aren't you trying to switch me off the subject?" Vane retorted with a laugh. "It's Celia Hartley that I want to talk about."

He did her an injustice. Jessy felt that she had earned his gratitude, and she had no objection to his expressing it.

"It was a happy thought of yours to give her hats and things to make; I'm ever so much obliged to you," he went on. "I felt that you could be trusted to think of the right thing. An ingenious idea of that kind would never have occurred to me."

Jessy smiled up at him.

"It was very simple," she said sweetly. "I noticed a hat and dress of hers, which she admitted she had made. The girl has some talent; I'm only sorry I can't keep her busy."

"Couldn't you give her an order for a dozen hats? I'd be glad to be responsible."

Jessy laughed.

"The difficulty would be the disposal of them. They would be of no use to you; and I couldn't allow you to present them to me."

"I wish I could," Vane declared. "You certainly deserve them."

This was satisfactory, so far as it went, though Jessy would have preferred that his desire to bestow the favor should have sprung from some other motive than a recognition of her services to Celia Hartley.

She was, however, convinced that his only feeling toward the girl was one of compassion. Then she saw that he was looking at her with half-humorous annoyance in his face.

"Are you really grieved because I won't take those hats?" she asked lightly.

"I am," Vane confessed, and then proceeded to explain with rather unnecessary ingenuousness: "I'm still more vexed with the state of things that it's typical of — I suppose I mean the restrictedness of this civilized life. When you want to do anything in the bush, you take the ax and set about it; but here you're continually running up against some quite unnecessary barrier."

"One understands that it's worse in England," Jessy returned dryly. "But in regard to Miss Hartley, I'll recommend her to my friends, as far as I can."

Vane made an abrupt movement, and Jessy realized by his expression that he had suddenly become oblivious of her presence. She had no doubt about the reason, for just then Evelyn Chisholm had entered the room. The lamplight fell upon her as she crossed the threshold, and Jessy recognized unwillingly that she looked surprisingly handsome. Handsome, however, was not the word Vane would have used. He thought Evelyn looked exotic: highly cultivated, strangely refined, as though she had grown up in a rarefied atmosphere in which nothing rank could thrive. Exactly what suggested this it was difficult to define; but the man felt that she had brought along with her the clean, chill air of the heights where the cloud-berries bloom. She was a flower of the dim and misty North, which has nevertheless its flashes of

radiant, ethereal beauty. Though Evelyn had her faults, the impression she made on Vane was, perhaps, more or less justifiable.

Then he remembered that the girl had been offered to him and he had refused the gift. He wondered how he had exerted the necessary strength of will, for he was conscious that admiration, respect, pity, had now changed and melted into sudden passion. His blood tingled, and he felt strangely happy.

Laying a check upon his thoughts, he resumed a desultory conversation with Jessy, but he betrayed himself several times during it, for no change of his expression was lost upon the girl. At length she let him go. It was some time, however, before he secured a place beside Evelyn, a little apart from the others. He was now unusually quiet and self-contained.

"Nairn promised me an astonishment this evening, but it exceeds all my expectations," he said. "How are your people?"

Evelyn informed him that their health was satisfactory and added, watching him the while:

"Gerald sent his best remembrances."

"Thank you," Vane responded in a casual manner; "I am glad to have them."

Evelyn was now convinced that Mabel had been correct in concluding that he had assisted Gerald financially, though she was aware that nothing would induce either of the men to acquaint her with the fact.

"And Mopsy?" he inquired.

"I left her in tears because she could not come. She sent you so many confused messages that I'm afraid I've forgotten them."

Vane's face grew gentle.

"Dear little girl! It's a pity you couldn't have brought her. Mopsy and I are great friends."

Evelyn smiled at him. The tenderness of the man appealed to her; and she knew that to be the friend of anyone meant a good deal to him.

"You are her hero," she told him. "I don't think it is because you pulled her out of the water, either; in fact, I think you won her regard when you mended her canoe. You have a reputation to keep up with Mopsy."

There was no answering smile in Vane's eyes.

"Well, I shouldn't like to disappoint her; but isn't it curious what effect some things have? A patch on Mopsy's canoe, for instance — and I've known a piece of cold pie carry with it a big obligation."

The last was somewhat cryptic, and Evelyn looked at him with surprise, until it dawned on her that he had merely been half-consciously expressing a wandering thought aloud.

"I understood from Mrs. Nairn that you were away in the bush," she said.

"That was the case; and I'm shortly going off again. Perhaps it's fortunate that I may be away some time. It will leave you more at ease."

The last remark was more of a question than an assertion. Evelyn knew that the man could be direct; and she esteemed candor.

"No," she answered; "I shouldn't wish you to think that — and I shouldn't like to believe that I had anything to do with driving you away."

Vane saw a faintly warmer tone show through the clear pallor of her skin, but while his heart beat faster than usual he recognized that she meant just what

she said and nothing more. He must proceed with caution, and this, on the whole, was foreign to him. Shortly afterward he left her.

When he had gone, Evelyn sat thinking about him. She had shrunk from the man in rebellious alarm when her parents would have bestowed her hand on him; but even then, and undoubtedly afterward, she had felt that there was something in his nature which would have attracted her had she been willing to allow it to do so. Now, though he had said nothing to rouse it, the feeling had grown stronger. Then she remembered with a curious smile her father's indignation when Vane had withdrawn from the field. He had done this because she had appealed to his generosity, and she had been grateful to him; but, unreasonable as she admitted the faint resentment she was conscious of to be, the recollection of the fact that he had yielded to her wishes was somehow bitter.

In the meanwhile Carroll had taken his place by Jessy's side.

"I understand that you steered your comrade satisfactorily through the meeting to-day," she began.

"No," objected Carrol; "I can't claim any credit for doing so. In matters of that kind Vane takes full control; and I'm willing to own that he drove us all, including your brother, on the course he chose."

Jessy laughed good-humoredly.

"Then it's in other matters you exercise a little judicious pressure on the helm?"

The man looked at her in well-assumed admiration of her keenness.

"I don't know how you guessed it, but I suppose it's a fact. It's an open secret, however, that Vane's

now and then unguardedly ingenuous; indeed, there are respects in which he's a babe by comparison with, we'll say, either of us."

"That's rather a dubious compliment. By the way, what do you think of Miss Chisholm? I suppose you saw a good deal of her in England?"

Carroll's eyes twinkled.

"I spent a month or two in her company; so did Vane. I fancy she's rather like him in several ways; and there are reasons for believing that he thinks a good deal of her."

Having watched Vane carefully when Evelyn came in, Jessy was inclined to agree with him. She glanced round the room. One or two people were moving about and the others were talking in little groups; but there was nobody very near, and she fancied that she and her companion were safe from interruption.

"What are some of the reasons?" she asked boldly.

Carroll had expected some question of this description, and had decided to answer it plainly. It seemed probable that Jessy would get the information out of him in one way or another, anyway; and he had also another reason, which he thought a commendable one. Jessy had obviously taken a certain interest in Vane, but it could not have gone very far as yet, and Vane did not reciprocate it. His comrade, however, was impulsive, while Jessy was calculating and clever; and Carroll foresaw that complications might follow any increase of friendliness between her and Vane. He thought it might be wise to warn her to leave Vane alone.

"Well," he answered, "since you have asked, I'll try to tell you."

He proceeded to recount what had passed at the Dene and Jessy listened, sitting perfectly still, with an expressionless face.

"So he gave her up — because he admired her?" she said at length.

"That's my view of it. Of course, it sounds unlikely, but I don't think it is so in my partner's case."

Jessy made no comment, but he felt that she was hit hard, and that was not what he had anticipated. He began to wonder whether he had acted judiciously. He glanced about the room, as it did not seem considerate to study her expression just then. A few moments later she turned to him with a smile in which there was the faintest hint of strain.

"I dare say you are right; but there are one or two people to whom I haven't spoken."

She moved away from him, and a little while afterward Mrs. Nairn came upon Carroll standing for the moment alone.

"It's no often one sees ye looking moody," she said. "Was Jessy no gracious?"

"That," replied Carroll, smiling, "is not the difficulty. I'm an unsusceptible and a somewhat inconspicuous person — not worth powder and shot, so to speak; for which I'm sometimes thankful. I believe it saves me a good deal of trouble."

"Then is it something Vane has done that is on your mind? Doubtless, ye feel him a responsibility."

"He's what you'd call all that," Carroll declared. "Still, you see, I've constituted myself his guardian. I don't know why; he'd probably be very vexed if he suspected it."

"The gods give ye a good conceit of yourself," Mrs. Nairn laughed.

"I need it. This afternoon I let him do a most injudicious thing; and now I've done another which I fear is worse. On the whole, I think I'd better take him away to the bush. He'd be safer there."

"Ye will no; no just now," declared his hostess firmly.

Carroll made a sign of resignation.

"Oh, well," he agreed, "if you say so. I'm quite willing to stand out and let things alone. Too many cooks are apt to spoil the kale."

Mrs. Nairn left him, but she afterward glanced thoughtfully once or twice at Vane and Evelyn, who had again drawn together.

## CHAPTER XXII

### EVELYN GOES FOR A SAIL

VANE sat in Nairn's office with a frown on his face. Specimens of ore lately received from the mine were scattered about a table and Nairn had some papers in his hand.

"Weel?" inquired the Scotchman when Vane, after examining two or three of the stones, abruptly flung them down.

"The ore's running poorer. On the other hand, I partly expected this. There's better stuff in the reef. We're a little too high, for one thing; I look for more encouraging results when we start the lower heading."

He went into details of the new operations, and when he finished Nairn looked up from the figures he had been jotting down.

"Yon workings will cost a good deal," he pointed out. "Ye will no be able to make a start until we're sure of the money."

"We ought to get it."

Nairn looked thoughtful.

"A month or two ago, I would have agreed with ye; but general investors are kittle folk, and the applications for the new stock are no numerous."

"Howitson promised to subscribe largely; and Bendle pledged himself to take a considerable block."

"I'm no denying it. But we have no been favored with their formal applications yet."

"You had better tell me if you have anything particular in your mind," Vane said bluntly.

An unqualified affirmation is not strictly in accordance with the Scottish character, and Nairn was seldom rash.

"I would have ye remember what I told ye about the average investor," he replied. "He has no often the boldness to trust his judgment nor the sense to ken a good thing when he sees it — he waits for a lead, and then joins the rush when other folk are going in. What makes a mineral or other stock a favorite for a time is now and then no easy to determine; but we'll allow that it becomes so — ye will see men who should have mair sense thronging to buy and running the price up. Like sheep they come in, each following the other; and like sheep they run out, if anything scares them. It's no difficult to start a panic."

"The plain English of it is that the mine is not so popular as it was," retorted Vane impatiently.

"I'm thinking something of the kind," Nairn agreed. Then he proceeded with a cautious explanation: "The result of the first reduction and the way ye forced the concern on the market secured ye notice. Folk put their money on ye, looking for sensational developments, and when the latter are no forthcoming they feel a bit sore and disappointed."

"There's nothing discouraging in our accounts. Even if the ore all ran as poor as that,"— Vane pointed to the specimens on the table —"the mine could be worked on a reasonably satisfactory paying basis.

We have issued no statements that could spread alarm."

"Just so. What was looked for was more than reasonable satisfaction — ye have no come up to expectations. Forby, it's my opinion that damaging reports have somehow leaked out from the mine. Just now I see clouds on the horizon."

"Bendle pledged himself to take up a big block of the shares," repeated Vane. "If Howitson does the same, as he said he would, our position would be secure. As soon as it was known that they were largely interested, others would follow them."

"Now ye have it in a nutshell — it would put a wet blanket on the project if they both backed down. In the meanwhile we canna hurry them. Ye will have to give them time."

Vane rose.

"We'll leave it at that. I've promised to take Mrs. Nairn and Miss Chisholm for a sail."

By the time he reached the water-front he had got rid of the slight uneasiness the interview had occasioned him. He found Mrs. Nairn and Evelyn awaiting him with Carroll in attendance, and in a few minutes they were rowing off to the sloop. As they approached her, the elder lady glanced with evident approval at the craft, which swam, a gleaming ivory shape, upon the shining green brine.

"Ye have surely been painting the boat," she exclaimed. "Was that for us?"

Vane disregarded the question.

"She wanted it, and paint's comparatively cheap. It has been good drying weather the last few days."

It was a little thing, but Evelyn was pleased. The girls had not been greatly considered at the Dene, and it was flattering to recognize that the man had thought it worth while to decorate his craft in her honor; she supposed it had entailed a certain amount of work. She did not ask herself if he had wished to please her; he had invited her for a sail some days ago, and he was thorough in everything he did. He helped her and Mrs. Nairn on board and when they sat down in the well he and Carroll proceeded to hoist the mainsail. It looked exceedingly large as it thrashed and fluttered above their heads, and there seemed to be a bewildering quantity of ropes, but Evelyn was interested chiefly in watching Vane.

He was wonderfully quick, but no movement was wasted. His face was intent, his glances sharp, and she liked the crisp, curt way in which he spoke to Carroll. The man's task was, in one sense, not important, but he was absorbed in it. Then while Carroll slipped the moorings, Vane ran up the headsails and springing aft seized the tiller as the boat, slanting over, commenced to forge through the water. It was the first time Evelyn had ever traveled under sail and, receptive as she was of all new impressions, she sat silent a few minutes rejoicing in the sense of swift and easy motion. The inlet was crisped by small white ripples, and the boat with her boom broad off on her quarter drove through them, with a wedge of foam on her lee bow and a stream of froth sluicing past her sides. Overhead, the great inclined sail cut, sharply white, against the dazzling blue of the mid-morning sky.

Evelyn glanced farther around. Wharves stacked

with lumber, railroad track, clustering roofs, smoking mills, were flitting fast astern. Ahead, a big side-wheel steamer was forging, foam-ringed, toward her, with the tall spars of a four-master towering behind, and stately pines, that apparently walled in the harbor, a little to one side. To starboard, beyond the wide stretch of white-flecked water, mountains ran back in ranks, with the chilly gleam of snow, which had crept lower since her arrival, upon their shoulders. It was a sharp contrast: the noisy, raw-new city and, so close at hand, the fringe of the wilderness.

They swept out through the gate of the Narrows, and Vane luffed the boat up to a moderately fresh breeze.

"It's off the land, and we'll have fairly smooth water," he explained. "How do you like sailing?"

Evelyn watched the white ridges, which were larger than the ripples in the inlet, smash in swift succession upon the weather bow and hurl the glittering spray into the straining mainsail. There was something fascinating in the way the gently-swaying boat clove through them.

"It's glorious!" she cried, looking first ahead then back toward the distant snow. "If anything more were wanted, there are the mountains, too."

Vane smiled, but there was a suggestive sparkle in his eyes.

"Yes; we have them both, and that's something to be thankful for. The sea and the mountains — the two grandest things in this world!"

"If you think that, how did you reconcile yourself to the city?"

"I'm not sure that I've done so." He indicated the

gleaming heights. "Anyway, I'm going back up yonder very soon."

Mrs. Nairn glanced at Carroll, who affected to be busy with a rope; then she turned to Vane.

"It will no be possible with winter coming on."

"It's not really so bad then," Vane declared. "Besides, I expect to get my work done before the hardest weather's due."

"But ye canna leave Vancouver until ye have settled about the mine!"

"I don't want to," Vane admitted. "That's not quite the same thing."

"It is with a good many people," Carroll interposed with a smile.

Evelyn fancied that there was something behind all this, but it did not directly concern her and she made no inquiry. In the meanwhile they were driving on to the southward, opening up the straits, with the forests to port growing smaller and the short seas increasing in size. The breeze was cold, but the girl was warmly clad and the easy motion in no way troubled her. The rush of keen salt air stirred her blood, and all round her were spread wonderful harmonies of silver-laced blue and green, through which the straining fabric that carried her swept on. The mountains were majestic, but except when tempests lashed their crags or torrents swept their lower slopes they were wrapped in eternal repose; the sea was filled with ecstatic motion.

"The hills have their fascination; it's a thing I know," she said, to draw the helmsman out. "I think I should like the sea, too; but at first sight it's charm isn't quite so plain."

"You have started him," interposed Carroll. "He won't refuse that challenge."

Vane accepted it with a smile which meant more than good-humored indulgence.

"Well," he declared, "the sea's the same everywhere, unbridled, unchanging; a force that remains as it was in the beginning. Once you're out of harbor, under sail, you have done with civilization. It has possibly provided you with excellent gear, but it can do no more; you stand alone, stripped for the struggle with the elements."

"Is it always a struggle?"

"Always. The sea's as treacherous as the winds that vex it, pitiless, murderous. When you have only sail to trust to, you can never relax your vigilance; you must watch the varying drift of clouds and the swing of the certain tides. There's nothing and nobody to fall back upon when the breeze pipes its challenge; you have sloughed off civilization and must stand or fall by the raw natural powers with which man is born, and chief among them is the capacity for brutal labor. The thrashing sail must be mastered; the tackle creaking with the strain must be hauled in. Perhaps, that's the charm of it for some of us whose lives are pretty smooth — it takes one back, as I said, to the beginning."

"But haven't human progress and machines made life more smooth for everybody?"

Vane laughed somewhat grimly.

"Oh, no; I think that can never be done. So far, somebody pays for the others' ease. At sea, in the mine and in the bush man still grapples with a rugged, naked world."

The girl was pleased. She had drawn him out, and she thought that in speaking he had kept a fair balance between too crude a mode of colloquial expression and poetic elaboration. There was, she knew, a vein of poetic conception in him, and the struggle he had hinted at could be described fittingly only in heroic language. It was in one sense a pity that those who had the gift of it and cultivated imagination had, for the most part, never been forced into the fight; but that was, perhaps, not a matter of much importance. There were plenty of men, such as her companion, endowed with steadfast endurance who, if they seldom gave their thoughts free rein, rejoiced in the struggle; and by them the world's sternest work was done.

"After all," she went on, "we have the mountains in civilized England."

Vane did not respond with the same freedom this time. He was inclined to think he had spoken too unrestrainedly.

"Yes," he agreed, smiling; "you can walk about them — where you won't disturb the grouse — and they're grand enough; but if you look down you can see the motor dust trails and the tourist coaches in the valleys."

"But why shouldn't people enjoy themselves in that way?"

"I can't think of any reason. No doubt most of them have earned the right to do so. But you can't rip up those hills with giant-powder where you feel inclined, or set to work to root out some miles of forest. The Government encourages that kind of thing here."

"And that's the charm?"

"Yes; I suppose it is."

"I'd better explain," Carroll interposed. "Men of a certain temperament are apt to fall a prey to fantasies in the newer lands; any common sense they once possessed seems to desert them. After that, they're never happy except when they're ripping things — such as big rocks and trees — to pieces, and though they'll tell you it's only to get out minerals or to clear a ranch, they're wrong. Once they get the mine or ranch, they don't care about it; they set to work wrecking things again. Isn't that true, Mrs. Nairn?"

"There are such crazy bodies," agreed the lady. "I know one or two; but if I had my way with them, they should find one mine, or build one sawmill."

"And then," supplied Carroll, "you would chain them up for good by marrying them."

"I would like to try, but I'm no sure it would act in every case. I have come across some women as bad as the men; they would drive their husbands on."

She smiled in a half wistful manner.

"Maybe," she added, "it's as well to do something worth the remembering when ye are young. There's a long while to sit still in afterward."

Half in banter and half in earnest, they had given Evelyn a hint of the master passion of the true colonist, whose pride is in his burden. Afterward, Mrs. Nairn led the conversation until Carroll laid out in the saloon a somewhat elaborate lunch which he had brought from the hotel. Then the others went below, leaving Vane at the helm. When they came up again, Carroll looked at his comrade ruefully.

"I'm afraid Miss Chisholm's disappointed," he said.

"No," declared Evelyn; "that would be most ungrateful. I only expected a more characteristic example of sea cookery. After what Mr. Vane told us, a lunch like the one you provided, with glass and silver, struck me as rather an anachronism."

"It's better to be broken in to sea cookery gently," Vane interposed with some dryness.

Evelyn laughed.

"It's a poor compliment to take it for granted that we're afraid of a little hardship. Besides, I don't think you're right."

Vane left the helm to Carroll and went below.

"He won't be long," Carroll informed the girl, with a smile. "He hasn't got rid of all his primitive habits yet. I'll give him ten minutes."

When Vane came up, he glanced about him before he resumed the helm and noticed that it was blowing fresher. They were also drawing out from the land and the short seas were getting bigger; but he held on to the whole sail, and an hour or so afterward a white iron bark, light in ballast, with her rusty load-line high above the water, came driving up to meet them. She made a striking picture, Evelyn thought, with the great curve of her forecourse, which was still set, stretching high above the foam that spouted about her bows and tier upon tier of gray canvas diminishing aloft. With the wind upon her quarter, she rode on an even keel, and the long iron hull, gleaming snowily in the sunshine, drove on, majestic, through a field of white-flecked green and azure. Abreast of

one quarter, a propeller tug that barely kept pace with her belched out a cloud of smoke.

"Her skipper's been up here before — he's no doubt coming for salmon," Vane explained. Then he turned to Carroll. "We'd better pass to lee of her."

Carroll let a foot or two of a rope run out and the sloop's bows swung round a little. Her rail was just awash, and she was sailing very fast. Then her deck slanted more sharply and the low rail became submerged in rushing foam.

"We'll heave down a reef when we're clear of the bark," Vane said.

The vessel was now to windward and coming up rapidly; to shorten sail they must first round up the boat, for which they no longer had room. A few moments later a fiercer blast swept suddenly down and the water boiled white between the bark and the sloop. The latter's deck dipped deeper until the lower part of it was lost in streaming froth. Carroll made an abrupt movement.

"Shall I drop the peak?"

"No. There's the propeller close to lee."

The tug was hidden by the inclined sail, but Evelyn, clinging tightly to the coaming, understood that they were running into the gap between the two vessels and in order to avoid collision with one or the other, must hold on as they were through the stress of the squall. How much more the boat would stand she did not know, but it looked as if it were going over bodily. Then a glance at the helmsman's face reassured her. It was fixed and expressionless, but she somehow felt that whatever was necessary would be

promptly done. He was not one to lose his nerve or vacillate in a crisis, and his immobility appealed to her, because she knew that if occasion arose it would be replaced by prompt decisive action.

In the meanwhile the slant of sail and deck increased. One side of the sloop was hove high out of the sea. It was all the girl could do to hold herself upright, and Mrs. Nairn had fallen against and was only supported by the coaming to leeward. Then the wind was suddenly cut off and the sloop rose with a bewildering lurch, as the tall iron hull to weather forged by, hurling off the sea. She passed, and while Vane called out something and Carroll scrambled forward, the sloop swayed violently down again. Everything in her creaked; the floorings sloped away beneath Evelyn's feet, and now the madly-whirling froth poured in across the coaming. The veins stood out on the helmsman's forehead, his pose betrayed the tension on his arms; but the sloop was swinging round, and she fell off before the wind when the upper half of the great sail collapsed.

Rising more upright, she flung the water off her deck, and for some moments drove on at a bewildering speed; then there was a mad thrashing as Vane brought her on the wind again. The two men, desperately busy, mastered the fluttering sail, and in a few more minutes they were running homeward, with the white seas splashing harmlessly astern. It was now difficult to believe they had been in any danger, but Evelyn felt that she had had an instance of the sea's treachery; what was more, she had witnessed an exhibition of human nerve and skill. Vane, with his half-formulated thoughts which yet had depth to

them and his flashes of imagination, had interested her; but now he had been revealed in his finer capacity, as a man of action.

"I'd have kept to weather of the bark, where we'd have had room to luff, if I'd expected that burst of wind," he explained. "Did you hurt yourself against the coaming, Mrs. Nairn?"

The lady smiled reassuringly.

"It's no worth mentioning, and I'm no altogether unused to it. Alic once kept a boat and would have me out with him."

The remainder of the trip proved uneventful, and as they ran homeward the breeze gradually died away. The broad inlet lay still in the moonlight when they crept across it with the water lapping very faintly about the bows, and it was over a mirror-like surface they rowed ashore. Nairn was waiting at the foot of the steps and Evelyn walked back with him, feeling, she could not tell exactly why, that she had been drawn closer to the sloop's helmsman.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### VANE PROVES OBDURATE

VANE spent two or three weeks very pleasantly in Vancouver, for Evelyn, of whom he saw a good deal, was gracious to him. The embarrassment both had felt on their first meeting in the western city had speedily vanished; they had resumed their acquaintance on what was ostensibly a purely friendly footing, and since both avoided any reference to what had taken place in England, it had ripened into a mutual confidence and appreciation.

This would have been less probable in the older country, where they would have been continually reminded of what the Chisholm family expected of them; but the past seldom counts for much in the new and changeful West, where men look forward to the future. Indeed, there is something in its atmosphere which banishes regret and retrospection; and when Evelyn looked back at all, she felt inclined to wonder why she had once been so troubled by the man's satisfaction with her company. She decided that this could not have been the result of any aversion for him, and that it was merely an instinctive revolt against the part her parents had wished to force upon her. Chisholm and his wife had blundered, as such people often do, for it is possible that had they adopted a perfectly neutral attitude everything would have

gone as they desired. Their mistake was nevertheless a natural one. Somewhat exaggerated reports of Vane's prosperity had reached them; but while they coveted the advantages his wealth might offer their daughter, in their secret hearts they looked upon him as a raw Colonial and something of a barbarian, and the opinions he occasionally expressed in their hearing did not dispel this idea. Both feared that Evelyn regarded him in the same light, and it accordingly became evident that a little pressure might be required. In spite of their prejudices, they did not shrink from applying it.

In the meanwhile, several people in Vancouver watched the increase of friendliness between the girl and Vane. Mrs. Nairn and her husband did so with benevolent interest, and it was by Mrs. Nairn's adroit management, which even Evelyn did not often suspect, that they were thrown more and more into each other's company. Jessy Horsfield, however, looked on with bitterness. She was a strong-willed young woman who hitherto had generally contrived to obtain whatever she had set her heart on; and she had set it on this man. Indeed, she had fancied that he returned the feeling, but disillusionment had come on the evening when he had unexpectedly met Evelyn. Her smoldering resentment against the girl grew steadily stronger, until it threatened to prove dangerous on opportunity.

There were, however, days when Vane was disturbed in mind. Winter was coming on, and although it is rarely severe on the southern seaboard, it is by no means the season one would choose for an adventure among the ranges of the northern wilderness. Unless he made his search for the spruce very shortly

he might be compelled to postpone it until the spring, at the risk of some hardy prospector's forestalling him; but there were two reasons which detained him. He thought that he was gaining ground in Evelyn's esteem and he feared the effect of absence, and there was no doubt that the new issue of the Clermont shares was in very slack demand. To leave the city might cost him a good deal in several ways, but he had pledged himself to go.

That fact was uppermost in his mind one evening when he set off to call on Celia Hartley. As it happened, Evelyn and Mrs. Nairn were driving past as he turned off from a busy street toward the quarter in which she lived. It had been dark for some time, but the street was well lighted and Evelyn had no difficulty in recognizing him. Indeed, she watched him for a few moments while he passed on into a more shadowy region, where the gloom and dilapidation of the first small frame houses were noticeable. Beyond them there was scarcely a light at all; the neighborhood looked mysterious, and she wondered what kind of people inhabited it. She did not think that Mrs. Nairn had noticed Vane.

"You have never taken me into the district on our left," she said.

"I'm no likely to. We're no proud of it."

Evelyn was a little astonished. She had seen no signs of squalor or dissipation since she entered Canada, and had almost fancied that they did not exist.

"I suppose the Chinese and other aliens live there?"

"They do," was the dry answer. "I'm no sure, however, that they're the worst."

"But one understands that you haven't a criminal population."

"We have folk who're on the fringe of it, only we see that they live all together. Folk who would be respectable live somewhere else, except, maybe, a few who have to consider cheapness. There's no great difference in human nature wherever ye find it, and I do no suppose we're very much better than the rest of the world; but it's no a recommendation to be seen going into yon quarter after dark."

This left Evelyn thoughtful, for she had undoubtedly seen Vane going there. She considered herself a judge of character and generally trusted her intuitions, and she believed that the man's visit to the neighborhood in question admitted of some satisfactory explanation. On the other hand, she felt that her friends should be beyond suspicion. Taking it all round, she was rather vexed with Vane, and it cost her some trouble to drive the matter out of her mind.

She did not see Vane the next day, but the latter called upon Nairn at his office during the afternoon.

"Have you had any more applications for the new stock?" he asked.

"I have no. Neither Bendle nor Howitson has paid up yet, though I've seen them about it once or twice."

"Investors are shy; that's a fact," Vane confessed. "It's unfortunate. I've already put off my trip north as long as possible. I wanted to see things arranged on a satisfactory basis before I went."

"A very prudent wish. I should advise ye to carry it out."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Something like this — if the money's no forthcoming, we may be compelled to fall back upon a different plan, and unless ye're to the fore, the decision of a shareholders' meeting might no suit ye. Considering the position and the stock ye hold, any views ye might express would carry more weight than mine would do in your absence."

Vane drummed with his fingers on the table.

"I suppose that's the case; but I've got to make the journey. With moderately good fortune it shouldn't take me long."

"Ye would be running some risk if anything delayed ye and we had to call a meeting before ye got back."

Vane frowned.

"I see that; but it can't be helped. I expect to be back before I'm wanted. Anyway, I could leave you authority to act on my behalf."

After a further attempt to dissuade him, Nairn spread out one hand resignedly.

"He who will to Cupar maun be left to gang," he said. "Whiles, I have wondered why any one should be so keen on getting there, but doubtless a douce Scottish town has mair attractions for a sensible person than the rugged Northwest in the winter-time."

Vane smiled and shortly afterward went out and left him; and when Nairn reached home he briefly recounted the interview to his wife over his evening meal. Evelyn listened attentively.

"Yon man will no hear reason," Nairn concluded. "He's thrawn."

Evelyn had already noticed that her host, for whom

she had a strong liking, spoke broader Scotch when he was either amused or angry, and she supposed that Vane's determination disturbed him.

"But why should he persist in leaving the city, when it's to his disadvantage to do so, as you lead one to believe it is?" she asked.

"If the latter's no absolutely certain, it's very likely."

"You have answered only half my question."

Mrs. Nairn smiled.

"Alic," she explained, "is reserved by nature; but if ye're anxious for an answer, I might tell ye."

"Anxious hardly describes it."

"Then we'll say curious. The fact is that Vane made a bargain with a sick prospector, in which he undertook to locate some timber the man had discovered away among the mountains. He was to pay the other a share of its value when he got his Government license."

"Is the timber very valuable?"

"No," broke in Nairn. "One might make a fair business profit out of pulping it, though the thing's far from certain."

"Then why is Mr. Vane so determined on finding it?"

The question gave Mrs. Nairn a lead, but she decided to say no more than was necessary.

"The prospector died, but that bound the bargain tighter, in Vane's opinion. The man died without a dollar, leaving a daughter worn out and ill with nursing him. According to the arrangement, his share will go to the girl."

"Then," said Evelyn, "Mr. Vane is really under-

taking the search, which may involve him in difficulties, in order to keep his promise to a man who is dead? And he will not even postpone it, because if he did so this penniless girl might, perhaps, lose her share? Isn't that rather fine of him?"

"On the whole, ye understand the position," Nairn agreed. "If ye desire my view of the matter, I would merely say that yon's the kind of man he is."

Evelyn made no further comment, though the last common phrase struck her as a most eloquent tribute. She had heard Vane confess that he did not want to go north at present, and she now understood that to do so might jeopardize his interests in the mine; but he was undoubtedly going. He meant to keep his promise in its fullest and widest meaning — that was what one would expect of him.

One mild afternoon, a few days later, he took her for a drive among the Stanley pines, and, though she knew that she would regret his departure, she was unusually friendly. Vane rejoiced at it, but he had already decided that he must endeavor to proceed with caution and to content himself in the meanwhile with the part of trusted companion. For this reason, he chatted lightly, which he felt was safer, during most of the drive; but once or twice, when by chance or design she asked a leading question, he responded without reserve. He did so when they were approaching a group of giant conifers.

"I wonder whether you ever feel any regret at having left England for this country?" she asked.

"I did so pretty often when I first came out," he answered with a smile. "In those days I had to work in icy water and carry massive lumps of rock."

"I dare say regret was a natural feeling then; but that wasn't quite what I meant."

"So I supposed," Vane confessed. "Well, I'd better own that when I'd spent a week or two in England — at the Dene — I began to think I'd missed a good deal by not staying at home. It struck me that the life you led had a singular charm. Everything went so smoothly there, among the sheltering hills. One felt that care and anxiety could not creep in. Somehow, the place reminded me of Avalon."

"The impression was by no means correct," smiled Evelyn. "But I don't think you have finished. Won't you go on?"

"Then if I get out of my depth, you mustn't blame me. By and by I discovered that charm wasn't the right word — the place was permeated with a narcotic spell."

"Narcotic? Do you think the term's more appropriate?"

"I do. Narcotics, one understands, are insidious things. If you take them regularly, in small doses, they increase their hold on you until you become wrapped up in dreams and unrealities. If, however, you get too big a dose of them at the beginning, it leads to a vigorous revulsion. It's nature's warning and remedy."

"You're not flattering; but I almost fancy you're right."

"We are told that man was made to struggle — to use all his powers. If he rests too long beside the still backwaters of life, in fairy-like dales, they're apt to atrophy, and he finds himself slack and nerveless when he goes out to face the world again."

Evelyn nodded, for she had felt and striven against the insidious influence of which he spoke. She had now and then left the drowsy dale for a while; but the life of which she had then caught glimpses was equally sheltered — one possible only to the favored few. Even the echoes of the real tense struggle seldom passed its boundaries.

"But you confessed not long ago that you loved the western wilderness," she said. "You have spent a good deal of time in it; and you expect to do so again. After all, isn't that only exchanging one beautiful, tranquil region for another? The bush must be even quieter than the English dales."

"Perhaps I haven't made the point quite clear. When one goes up into the bush, it's not to lounge and dream there, but to make war upon it with ax and drill."

He pulled up his team and pointed to the clump of giant trees.

"Look there! That's nature's challenge to man in this country."

Evelyn recognized that it was an impressive one. The great trunks ran up far aloft, tremendous columns, before their brighter portions were lost in the vaulted roof of somber greenery. They dwarfed the rig and team; she felt herself a pygmy by comparison.

"They're a little larger than the average," her companion explained. "Still, that's the kind of thing you run up against when you buy land to start a ranch or clear the ground for a mine. Chopping, sawing up, splitting those giants doesn't fill one with languorous dreams; the only dreams that our axmen indulge in materialize. It's an unending, bracing

struggle. There are leagues and leagues of trees, shrouding the valleys in a shadow that has lasted since the world was young; but you see the dawn of a wonderful future breaking in as the long ranks go down."

Once more, without clearly intending it, he had stirred the girl. He had not spoken in that rather fanciful style to impress her; she knew that, trusting in her comprehension, he had merely given his ideas free rein. But in doing so he had somehow made her hear the trumpet-call to action which, for such men, rings through the roar of the river and the song of the tall black pines.

"Ah!" she murmured, "it must be a glorious life, in many ways; but it's bound to have its drawbacks. Doesn't the flesh shrink from them?"

"The flesh?" He laughed. "In this land the flesh takes second place — except, perhaps, in the cities." He turned and looked at her curiously. "Why should you talk of shrinking? The bush couldn't daunt you; you have courage."

The girl's eyes sparkled, but not at the compliment. His words rang with freedom; the freedom of the heights, where heroic effort was the rule, in place of luxury. She longed now, as she had often done, to escape from bondage; to break away.

"Ah, well," she said, smiling half wistfully; "perhaps it's fortunate that such courage as I have may never be put to the test."

Though reticence was difficult, Vane made no comment. He had already spoken unguardedly, and he decided that caution would be desirable. As he started the team, an automobile came up, and he looked around as he drove on.

"It's curious that I never heard the thing," he remarked.

"I didn't, either," replied Evelyn. "I was too much engrossed in the trees. But I think Miss Horsfield was in it."

"Was she?" responded Vane in a very casual manner; and Evelyn, for no reason that she was willing to recognize, was pleased.

She had not been mistaken. Jessy Horsfield was in the automobile, and she had had a few moments in which to study Vane and his companion. The man's look and the girl's expression had struck her as significant; and her lips set in an ominously tight line as the car sped on. She felt that she almost hated Vane; and there was no doubt that she entirely hated the girl at his side. It would be soothing to humiliate her, to make her suffer, and though the exact mode of setting about it was not very clear just yet, she thought it might be managed. Her companion wondered why she looked preoccupied during the rest of the journey.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### JESSY STRIKES

IT was the afternoon before Vane's departure for the North, and Evelyn, sitting alone for the time being in Mrs. Nairn's drawing-room, felt disturbed by the thought of it. She sympathized with his object, as it had been briefly related by her hostess; but she supposed there was a certain risk attached to the journey, and that troubled her. In addition to this, there was another point on which she was not altogether pleased. She had twice seen him acknowledge a bow from a very pretty girl whose general appearance suggested that she did not belong to Evelyn's own walk in life, and that very morning she had noticed him crossing a street in the young woman's company. Vane, as it happened, had met Kitty Blake by accident and had asked her to accompany him on a visit to Celia. Evelyn did not think she was of a jealous disposition, and jealousy appeared irrational in the case of a man whom she had dismissed as a suitor; but the thing undoubtedly rankled in her mind. While she was considering it, Jessy Horsfield entered the room.

"I'm here by invitation, to join Mr. Vane's other old friends in giving him a good send-off," she explained. "Only, Mrs. Nairn told me to come over earlier."

Evelyn noticed that Jessy laid some stress upon her

acquaintance with Vane, and wondered whether she had any motive for doing so.

"I suppose you have known him for some time?"

"Oh, yes," was the careless answer. "My brother was one of the first to take him up when he came to Vancouver."

The phrase jarred on Evelyn. It savored of patronage; besides, she did not like to think that Vane owed anything to the Horsfields.

"Though I don't know much about it, I understood that they were opposed to each other," she said coldly.

Jessy laughed.

"Their business interests don't coincide; but it doesn't follow that they should disagree about anything else. My brother did all he could to dissuade Mr. Vane from going on with his search for the timber until the winter is over."

This was true, inasmuch as Horsfield had spoken to Vane about the subject, though it is possible that he would not have done so had he expected the latter to yield to his reasoning. Vane was one whom opposition usually rendered more determined.

"I think it is rather fine of him to persist in it," Evelyn declared.

Jessy smiled, though she felt venomous just then.

"Yes," she agreed; "one undoubtedly feels that. Besides, the thing's so characteristic of him; the man's impulsively generous and not easily daunted. He possesses many of the rudimentary virtues, as well as some of the corresponding weaknesses, which is very much what one would look for."

"What do you mean by that?" Evelyn inquired with a trace of asperity. Though she was not prepared

to pose as Vane's advocate, she was conscious of a growing antagonism toward her companion.

"It's difficult to explain, and I don't know that the subject's worth discussing," answered Jessy. "However, what I think I meant was this — Mr. Vane's of a type that's not uncommon in the West, and it's a type one finds interesting. He's forcibly elementary, which is the only way I can express it; the restraints the rest of us submit to don't bind him — he breaks through them."

This, Evelyn fancied, was more or less correct. Indeed, the man's fearless disregard of hampering customs had pleased her, but she recognized that some restraints are needful. Her companion followed the same train of thought.

"When one breaks down or gets over fences, it's necessary to discriminate," she went on. "Men of the Berserker type, however, are more addicted to going straight through the lot. In a way, they're consistent — having smashed one barrier why should they respect the next?"

Jessy, as she was quite aware, was playing a dangerous game; one that might afterward be exposed. The latter possibility, however, was of less account, for detection would come too late if she were successful. She was acquainted with the salient points of Evelyn's character.

"They're consistent, if not always very logical," she concluded after a pause. "One endeavors to make allowances for men of that description."

Something in her tone roused Evelyn to sudden imperious anger. It was intolerable that this woman should offer excuses for Vane.

"What particular allowances do you feel it needful to make in Mr. Vane's case?" she asked haughtily.

Now that she was faced by the direct question, Jessy hesitated. As a rule, she was subtle, but she could be ruthlessly frank, and she was possessed by a passionate hatred of the girl beside her.

"You have forced me to an explanation," she smiled. "The fact is that while he has a room at the hotel he has an — establishment — in a different neighborhood. Unfortunately such places are a feature of some western towns."

It was a shock to Evelyn; one that she found hard to face; though she was not convinced. The last piece of information agreed with something Mrs. Nairn had told her; but, although she had on one occasion had the testimony of her eyes in support of it, Jessy's first statement seemed incredible.

"It's impossible!"

Jessy smiled in a bitter manner.

"It's unpleasant, but it can't be denied. He undoubtedly pays the rent of a shack in the neighborhood I mentioned."

Evelyn sat tensely still for a moment or two. She dare not give rein to her feelings, for she would not betray herself; but composure was extremely difficult.

"If that is true," she demanded, "how is it that he is received everywhere — at your house and by Mrs. Nairn? He is coming here to-night."

Jessy shrugged her shoulders.

"People in general are more or less charitable in the case of a successful man. Apart from that, Mr. Vane has a good many excellent qualities. As I said, one has to make allowances."

Just then, to Evelyn's relief, Mrs. Nairn came in, and though the girl suffered during the time, it was half an hour before she could find an excuse for slipping away alone. Then, sitting in the gathering darkness in her own room, she set herself to consider, as dispassionately as possible, what she had heard. It was exceedingly difficult to believe the charge, but Jessy's assertion was definite enough, and one which, if incorrect, could readily be disproved. Nobody would say such a thing unless it could be substantiated; and that led Evelyn to consider why Jessy had given her the information. She had obviously done so with at least a trace of malice, but it could hardly have sprung from jealousy; Evelyn could not think that a woman would vilify a man for whom she had any tenderness. Besides, she had seen Vane entering the part of the town indicated, where he could not have had any legitimate business. Hateful as the suspicion was, it could not be contemptuously dismissed. Then she recognized that she had no right to censure the man; he was not accountable to her for his conduct — but calm reasoning carried her no farther. She was once more filled with intolerable disgust and burning indignation. Somehow, she had come to believe in Vane, and he had turned out an impostor.

About an hour later Vane and Carroll entered the house with Nairn and proceeded to the latter's room, where he offered them cigars.

"So ye're all ready to sail the morn?"

Vane nodded and handed him a paper.

"There's your authority to act in my name, if it's required. If we have moderately fine weather, I expect to be back before there's much change in the sit-

uation; but I'll call at Nanaimo, where you can wire me if anything turns up during the two or three days it may take us to get there. The wind's ahead at present."

"I suppose there's no use in my saying anything more now; but I can't help pointing out that as head of the concern you have a certain duty to the shareholders which you seem inclined to disregard," Carroll remarked.

Vane smiled.

"I've no doubt that their interests will be as safe in Nairn's hands as in mine. What I stand to risk is the not getting my personal ideas carried out, which is a different matter, though I'll own that it wouldn't please me if they were overruled."

"I fail to see why ye could no have let the whole thing stand over until the spring," grunted Nairn. "The spruce will no run away."

"I'd have done so, had it been a few years earlier, but the whole country is overrun with mineral prospectors and timber righters now. Every month's delay gives somebody else a chance for getting in ahead of me."

"Weel," responded Nairn resignedly, "I can only wish ye luck; but, should ye be detained up yonder, if one of ye could sail across to Comox to see if there's any mail there it would be wise to do so." He waved his hand. "No more of that; we'll consider what tactics I had better adopt in case of delay."

An hour had passed before they went down to join the guests who were arriving for the evening meal. As a rule, the western business man, who is more or less engrossed in his occupation except when he is

asleep, enjoys little privacy; and Nairn's friends sometimes compared his dwelling to the rotunda of a hotel. The point of this was that people of all descriptions who have nothing better to do are addicted to strolling into the combined bazaar and lounge which is attached to many Canadian hostelries.

Vane was placed next to Evelyn at the table; but after a quiet reply to his first observation she turned and talked to the man at her other side. As the latter, who was elderly and dull, had only two topics — the most efficient means of desiccating fruit and the lack of railroad facilities — Vane was somewhat astonished that she appeared interested in his conversation, and by and by he tried again. He was not more successful this time, and his face grew warm as he realized that Evelyn was not inclined to talk to him. Being a very ordinary mortal and not particularly patient, he was sensible of some indignation, which was not diminished when, on looking around, Jessy Horsfield favored him with a compassionate smile. However, he took his part in the general conversation; and the meal was over and the guests were scattered about the adjoining rooms when, after impatiently waiting for the opportunity, he at last found Evelyn alone. She was standing with one hand on a table, looking rather thoughtful.

"I've come to ask what I've done?"

Evelyn was not prepared for this blunt directness and she felt a little disconcerted, but she broke into a chilly smile.

"The question's rather indefinite, isn't it? Do you expect me to be acquainted with all your recent actions?"

"Then I'll put the thing in another way — do you mind telling me how I have offended you?"

The girl almost wished that she could do so. Appearances were badly against him, but she felt that if he declared himself innocent she could take his word in the face of overwhelming testimony to the contrary. Unfortunately, however, it was unthinkable that she should plainly state the charge.

"Do you suppose I should feel warranted in forming any opinion upon your conduct?" she retorted.

"It strikes me that you have formed one, and it isn't favorable."

The girl hesitated a moment, but she had the courage of her convictions and she felt impelled to make some protest.

"That," she said, looking him in the eyes, "is perfectly true."

He seemed more puzzled than guilty, and once more she chafed against the fact that she could give him no opportunity for defending himself.

"Well," he responded, "I'm sorry; but it brings us back to my first question."

The situation was becoming painful as well as embarrassing, and Evelyn, perhaps unreasonably, grew more angry with the man.

"I'm afraid that you either are clever at dissembling or have no imagination."

Vane held himself in hand with an effort.

"I dare say you're right on the latter point. It's a fact I'm sometimes thankful for. It leaves one more free to go straight ahead. Now, as I see the dried-fruit man coming in search of you and you evidently don't mean to answer me, I can't urge the matter."

He turned away and left her wondering why he had abandoned his usual persistency, unless it was that an uneasy conscience had driven him from the field. It did not occur to her that the man had under strong provocation merely yielded to the prompting of a somewhat hasty temper. In the meanwhile he crossed the room in an absent-minded manner and presently found himself near Jessy, who made room for him at her side.

"It looks as if you were in disgrace to-night," she said sweetly, and waited with concealed impatience for his answer. If Evelyn had been sufficiently clever or bold to give him a hint as to what he was suspected of, Jessy foresaw undesirable complications.

"I think I am," he owned without reflection. "The trouble is that, while I may deserve it on general grounds, I'm unconscious of having done anything very reprehensible in particular."

Jessy was sensible of considerable relief. The man was sore and resentful; he would not press Evelyn for an explanation, and the breach would widen. In the meanwhile she must play her cards skillfully.

"Then that fact should sustain you," she smiled. "We shall miss you after to-morrow — more than one of us. Of course, it's too late to tell you that you are not altogether wise in resolving to go."

"Everybody has been telling me the same thing for the last few weeks," he laughed.

"Then I'll only wish you every success. It's a pity that Bendle and the other man haven't paid up yet."

She met his surprised look with an engaging smile.

"You needn't be astonished. There's not very much goes on in the city that I don't hear about —

you know how men talk business here, and it's interesting to look on, even when one can't actually take a hand in the game. It's said that the watchers sometimes see the most of it."

"To tell the truth, it's the uncertainty as to what those two men might do that has chiefly been worrying me."

"Of course. I believe that I understand the position — they've been hanging fire, haven't they? But I've reasons for believing they'll come to a decision before very long."

Vane looked troubled.

"That's interesting, but I ought to warn you that your brother —"

Jessy stopped him with a smile.

"I've no intention of giving him away; and, as a matter of fact, I think you are a little prejudiced against him. After all, he's not your greatest danger. There's a cabal against you among your shareholders."

The man knit his brows, but she knew by the way he looked at her that he admired her acumen.

"Yes," he responded; "I've suspected that."

"There are two courses open to you — the first is to put off your expedition."

The answer was to the effect she had anticipated.

"That's impossible, for several reasons."

"The other is to call at Nanaimo and wait until, we'll say, next Thursday. If there's need for you to come back I think it will arise by then; but it might be better if you called at Comox too — after you leave the latter you'll be unreachable. If it seems

necessary, I'll send you a warning; if you hear nothing, you can go on."

Vane reflected hastily. Jessy, as she had told him, had opportunities for picking up valuable information about the business done in that city, and he had confidence in her.

"Thank you," he said. "It will be the second service you have done me, and I appreciate it. Anyway, I promised Nairn I'd call at Nanaimo, in case there should be a wire from him."

"It's a bargain; and now we'll talk of something else."

Jessy drew him into an exchange of badinage. Noticing, however, that Evelyn once or twice glanced at her with some astonishment, she presently got rid of him. She could understand Evelyn's attitude and she did not wish her friendliness with the offender to appear unnatural after what she had said about him.

At length the guests began to leave, and most of them had gone when Vane rose to take his departure. His host and hostess went with him to the door, but, though he once or twice glanced round eagerly, there was no sign of Evelyn. He lingered a few moments on the threshold after Mrs. Nairn had given him a kindly send-off; but nobody appeared in the lighted hall, and after another word with Nairn he went moodily down the steps to join Jessy and Carroll, who were waiting for him below. As the group walked down the garden path, Mrs. Nairn looked at her husband.

"I do no know what has come over Evelyn this night," she remarked.

Nairn followed Jessy's retreating figure with distrustful eyes.

"Weel," he drawled, "I'm thinking yon besom may have had a hand in the thing."

A few minutes later Jessy, standing where the light of a big lamp streamed down upon her through the boughs of a leafless maple, bade Vane farewell at her brother's gate.

"If my good wishes can bring you success, it will most certainly be yours," she said, and there was something in her voice which faintly stirred the man, who was feeling very sore.

"Thank you."

She did not immediately withdraw the hand she had given him. He was grateful to her and thought she looked unusually pretty with the sympathy shining in her eyes.

"You will not forget to wait at Nanaimo and Comox?" she reminded him.

"No. If you recall me, I'll come back at once; if not, I'll go on with a lighter heart, knowing that I can safely stay away."

Jessy said nothing further, and he moved on. She felt that she had scored and she knew when to stop. The man had given her his full confidence.

Soon afterward Vane entered his hotel, where he turned impatiently upon Carroll.

"You can go into the rotunda or the smoking-room and talk to any loafer who thinks it worth while to listen to your cryptic remarks," he said. "As we sail as soon as it's daylight to-morrow, I'm going to sleep."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE INTERCEPTED LETTER

THE wind was fresh from the northwest when Vane drove the sloop out through the Narrows in the early dawn and saw a dim stretch of white-flecked sea in front of him. Land-locked as they are by Vancouver Island, the long roll of the Pacific cannot enter those waters, but they are now and then lashed into short, tumbling seas, sufficient to make passage difficult for a craft no larger than the sloop. Carroll frowned when a comber smote the weather bow and a shower of stinging spray lashed his face.

"Right ahead again," he remarked. "But as I suppose you're going on, we'd better stretch straight across on the starboard tack. We'll get smoother water along the island shore."

They let her go and Vane sat at the helm hour after hour, drenched with spray, hammering her mercilessly into the frothy seas. They could have done with a second reef down, for the deck was swept and sluicing, and most of the time the lee rail was buried deep in rushing foam; but Vane showed no intention of shortening sail. Nor did Carroll, who saw that his comrade was disturbed in temper, suggest it; resolute action had, he knew, a soothing effect on Vane. As a matter of fact, Vane needed soothing. Of late, he had felt that he was making steady progress in Ev-

elyn's favor, and now she had most inexplainably turned against him. There was no doubt that, as Jessy had described it, he was in disgrace; but rack his brain as he would, he could not discover the reason. That he was conscious of no offense only made the position more galling.

In the meanwhile, the boat engrossed more and more of his attention, and though he was by no means careful of her, he spared no effort to get her to windward. It was a relief to drive her hard at some white-topped sea and watch her bows disappear in it with a thud, while it somehow eased his mind to see the smashed-up brine fly half the height of her drenched mainsail. There was also satisfaction in feeling the strain on the tiller when, swayed down by a fiercer gust, she plunged through the combers with the froth swirling, perilously close to the coaming, along her half-submerged deck. In all their moods, men of his kind find pleasure in such things; the turmoil, the rush, the need for quick, resolute action stirs the blood in them.

The day was cold; the man, who was compelled to sit almost still in a nipping wind, was soon wet through; but this in some curious way further tended to restore his accustomed optimism and good-humor. He had partly recovered both when, as the sloop drove through the whiter turmoil whipped up by a vicious squall, there was a crash forward.

"Down helm!" shouted Carroll. "The bobstay's gone!"

He scrambled toward the bowsprit, which having lost its principal support swayed upward, in peril of being torn away by the sagging jib. Vane first

rounded up the boat into the wind and then followed him; and for several minutes they had a savage struggle with the madly-flapping sail before they flung it, bundled up, into the well. Then they ran in the bowsprit, and Vane felt glad that, although the craft had been rigged in the usual western fashion as a sloop, he had changed that by giving her a couple of headsails in place of one.

"She'll trim with the staysail if we haul down another reef," he suggested.

It cost them some labor, but they were warmer afterward, and when they drove on again Vane glanced at the bowsprit.

"We'll try to get a bit of galvanized steel in Nanaimo," he said. "I can't risk another smash."

Carroll laughed.

"You'd better be prepared for one, if you mean to drive her as you have been doing." He flung back the saloon scuttle. "You'd have swamped her in another hour or two — the cabin floorings are all awash."

"Then hadn't you better pump her out?" retorted Vane. "After that, you can light the stove. It's beginning to dawn on me that it's a long while since I had anything worth speaking of to eat. The kind of lunch you brought along in the basket isn't sustaining."

They made a bountiful if somewhat primitive meal, in turn, sitting in the dripping saloon which was partly filled with smoke, and Carroll sighed for the comforts he had abandoned. He did not, however, mention his regrets, because he did not expect his comrade's sympathy. Vane seldom noticed what he was eating when he was on board his boat.

The craft, being under reduced sail, drove along more easily during the rest of the afternoon, and they ran into a little colliery town late on the following day. There Vane replaced the broken bobstay with a solid piece of steel, and then sat down to write a letter while Carroll stretched his cramped limbs ashore.

The letter was addressed to Evelyn, and he found it difficult to express himself as he desired. The spoken word, as he had discovered, is now and then awkward to use, but the written one is more evasive and complex still, and he shook his head ruefully over the production when he laid down his pen. This was, perhaps, unnecessary, for having grown calm he had framed a terse and forcible appeal to the girl's sense of justice, which would in all probability have had its effect on her had she received it. Though he hardly realized it, the few simple words were convincing.

Having had no news from Nairn or Jessy, they sailed again in a day or two, bound for Comox farther along the coast, where there was a possibility of communications overtaking them; but in the meanwhile matters which concerned them were moving forward in Vancouver.

It was rather early one afternoon when Jessy called on one of her friends and found her alone. Mrs. Bendle was a young and impulsive woman from one of the eastern cities and she had not made many friends in Vancouver yet, though her husband, whom she had lately married, was a man of some importance there.

"I'm glad to see you," she said, greeting Jessy eagerly. "It's a week since anybody has been in to

talk to me, and Tom's away again. It's a trying thing to be the wife of a western business man — you so seldom see him."

Jessy made herself comfortable in an easy-chair before she referred to one of her companion's remarks.

"Where has Mr. Bendle gone now?" she asked.

"Into the bush to look at a mine. He left this morning and it will be a week before he's back. Then he's going across the Selkirks with that Clavering man about some irrigation scheme."

This suggested one or two questions which Jessy desired to ask, but she did not frame them immediately. Mrs. Bendle was incautious and discursive, but there was nothing to be gained by being precipitate.

"It must be dull for you," she sympathized.

"I don't mean to complain. Tom's reasonable; the last time I said anything about being left alone he bought me a pair of ponies. He said I could have either them or an automobile, and I took the ponies. I thought them safer."

Jessy smiled.

"You're fortunate in several ways; there are not a great many people who can make such presents. But while everybody knows your husband has been successful lately, I'm a little surprised that he's able to go into Clavering's irrigation scheme. It's a very expensive one, and I understand that they intend to confine it to a few, which means that those interested will have to subscribe handsomely."

"Tom," explained her companion, "likes to have a number of different things in hand. He told me it was wiser, when I said that I couldn't tell my friends back East what he really is, because he seemed to be

everything at once. But your brother's interested in a good many things, too, isn't he?"

"I believe so," answered Jessy. "Still, I'm pretty sure he couldn't afford to join Clavering and at the same time take up a big block of shares in Mr. Vane's mine."

"But Tom isn't going to do the latter now."

Jessy was startled. This was valuable information which she could scarcely have expected to obtain so easily. There was more that she desired to ascertain, but she had no intention of making any obvious inquiries.

"It's generally understood that Mr. Vane and your husband are on good terms," she said. "You know him, don't you?"

"I've met him once or twice, and I like him, but when I mention him Tom smiles. He says it's unfortunate Mr. Vane can see only one thing at a time, and that the one which lies right in front of his eyes. For all that, he once owned that the man is likable."

"Then it's a pity he's unable to stand by him now."

Mrs. Bendle looked thoughtful.

"I really believe Tom's half sorry he can't do so. He said something last night that suggested it — I can't remember exactly what it was. Of course, I don't understand much about these matters, but Howitson was here talking business until late."

Jessy was satisfied. Her hostess's previous incautious admission had gone a long way, but to this was added the significant information that Bendle was inclined to be sorry for Vane. The fact that he and Howitson had decided on some joint action after a long private discussion implied that there was trouble

in store for the absent man, unless he could be summoned to deal with the crisis in person. Jessy wondered whether Nairn knew anything about the matter yet, and decided that she would call and try to sound him. This would be difficult, because Nairn was not the man to make any rash avowal, and he had an annoying habit of parrying an injudicious question with an enigmatical smile. In the meanwhile she led her companion away from the subject and they discussed millinery and such matters until she took her departure.

It was early in the evening when she reached Nairn's house, for she thought it better to arrive there a little before he came home. She was told that Mrs. Nairn and Miss Chisholm were out but were expected back shortly. Evelyn had been by no means cordial to her since their last interview, and Mrs. Nairn's manner had been colder; but Jessy decided to wait; and for the second time that day fortune seemed to play into her hands.

It was dark outside, but the entrance hall was brightly lighted and Jessy could see into it from where she sat. Highly trained domestics are generally scarce in the West, and the maid had left the door of the room open. Presently there was a knock at the outer door and a young lad came in with some letters in his hand. He explained to the maid that he had been to the post-office and had brought his employer's private mail. The maid pointed out that the top letter looked dirty, and the lad owned that he had dropped the bundle in the street. Then he withdrew and the maid laid the letters carelessly on a little table and also retired, banging a door behind her. The concussion

shook down the letters, and one, fluttering forward with the sudden draught, fell almost upon the threshold of the room. Jessy, who was methodical in most things, rose to pick it up and replace it with the rest.

When she reached the door, however, she stopped abruptly, for she recognized the rather large writing on the envelope. There was no doubt that it was from Vane and she noticed that it was addressed to Miss Chisholm. Jessy picked it up, and when she had laid the others on the table, she stood with Vane's letter in her hand.

"Has the man no pride?" she said half aloud.

Then she looked about her, listening, greatly tempted, and considering. There was no sound in the house; Evelyn and Mrs. Nairn were out, and the other occupants were cut off from her by a closed door. Nobody would know that she had entered the hall, and if the letter were subsequently missed it would be remembered that the lad had confessed to dropping the bundle. It was most unlikely, however, that any question regarding its disappearance would ever be asked. If there should be no response from Evelyn, Vane, she thought, would not renew his appeal. Jessy had no doubt that the letter contained an appeal of some kind which might lead to a reconciliation, and she knew that silence is often more potent than an outbreak of anger. She had only to destroy the letter, and the breach between the two people whom she desired to separate would widen automatically.

There was little risk of detection, but, standing tensely still, with set lips and heart beating faster than usual, she shrank from the decisive action. She could still replace the letter and look for other means of

bringing about what she wished. She was self-willed and endowed with few troublesome principles, but until she had poisoned Evelyn's mind against Vane she had never done anything flagrantly dishonorable. Then while she waited, irresolute, a fresh temptation seized her in the shape of a burning desire to learn what the man had to say. He would reveal his feelings in the message and she could judge the strength of her rival's influence over him. Jessy had her ideas on this point, but she could now see them confirmed or refuted by the man's own words.

Yet she hesitated, with a half-instinctive recognition of the fact that the decision she must make was an eventful one. She had transgressed grievously in one recent interview with Evelyn, but, while she had no idea of making reparation, she could at least stop short of a second offense. She had, perhaps, not gone too far yet, but if she ventured a little farther she might be driven on against her will and become inextricably involved in an entanglement of dishonorable treachery.

The issue hung in the balance — the slightest thing would have turned the scale — when she heard footsteps outside and the tinkle of a bell. Moving with a start, she slipped back into the room just before the maid opened the adjacent door. In another moment she thrust the envelope inside her dress, and gathered her composure as Mrs. Nairn and Evelyn entered the hall. The former approached the table and turned over the handful of letters.

"Two for ye from England, Evelyn, and one or two for me," she said, flashing a quick glance at the girl. "Nothing else; I had thought Vane would

maybe send a bit note from one of the island ports to say how he was getting on."

Then Jessy rose, smiling, to greet her hostess. The question was decided — it was too late to replace the letter now. She could not remember what they talked about during the next half-hour, but she took her part, until Nairn came in, and she contrived to have a word with him before leaving. Mrs. Nairn had gone out to give some instructions about supper, and when Evelyn followed her, Jessy turned to Nairn.

"Mr. Vane should be at Comox now," she began. "Have you any idea of recalling him? Of course, I know a little about the Clermont affairs."

Nairn glanced at her with thoughtful eyes.

"I'm no acquainted with any reason that would render such a course necessary."

Evelyn reappeared shortly after this, and Jessy excused herself from staying for the evening meal and walked home thinking hard. It was needful that Vane should be recalled. He had written to Evelyn, but Jessy still meant to send him word. He would be grateful to her, and, indignant and wounded as she was, she would not own herself beaten. She would warn the man, and afterward perhaps allow Nairn to send him a second message.

On reaching her brother's house, she went straight to her own room and tore open the envelope. The color receded from her face as she read, and sinking into a chair she sat still with hands clenched. The message was terse, but it was stirringly candid; and even where the man did not fully reveal his feelings in his words she could read between the lines. There was no doubt that he had given his heart unreservedly

into her rival's keeping. He might be separated from her, but Jessy knew enough of him to realize at last that he would not turn to another. The lurid truth was burned upon her brain — she might do what she would, but this man was not for her.

For a while she sat still, and then stooping swiftly she seized the letter, which she had dropped, and rent it into fragments. Her eyes had grown hard and cruel; love of the only kind that she was capable of had suddenly turned to hate. What was more, it was a hate that could be gratified.

A little later Horsfield came in. Jessy was very composed now, but she noticed that her brother looked at her in a rather unusual manner once or twice during the meal that followed.

"You make me feel that you have something on your mind," she observed at length.

"That's a fact."

Horsfield hesitated. He was attached to and rather proud of his sister.

"Well?" she prompted.

He leaned forward confidentially.

"See here," he said, "I've always imagined that you would go far, and I'm anxious to see you do so. I shouldn't like you to throw yourself away."

His sister could take a hint, but there was information that she desired and the man was speaking with unusual reserve.

"You must be plainer," she retorted with a slight show of impatience.

"Then, you have seen a good deal of Vane, and in case you have any hankering after his scalp, I think I'd better mention that there's reason to be-

lieve he won't be worth powder and shot before very long."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jessy with a calmness that was difficult to assume; "you may as well understand that there is nothing between Vane and me. I suppose you mean that Howitson and Bendle are turning against him?"

"Something like that." Horsfield's tone implied that her answer had afforded him relief. "The man has trouble in front of him."

Jessy changed the subject. What she had gathered from Mrs. Bendle was fully confirmed; but she had made up her mind. Evelyn's lover might wait for the warning which could save him, but he should wait in vain.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### ON THE TRAIL

IT was a long, wet sail up the coast with the wind ahead, and Carroll was quite content when, on reaching Comox, Vane announced his intention of stopping there until the mail came in. Immediately after its arrival, Carroll went ashore, and came back empty-handed.

"Nothing," he reported. "Personally, I'm pleased. Nairn could have advised us here if there had been any striking developments since we left the last place."

"I wasn't expecting to hear from him," Vane replied tersely.

Carroll read keen disappointment in his face, and was not surprised, although the absence of any message meant that it was safe for them to go on with their project and that should have afforded his companion satisfaction. The latter sat on deck, gazing somewhat moodily across the ruffled water toward the snow-clad heights of the mainland range. They towered, dimly white and majestic, above a scarcely-trodden wilderness, and Carroll, at least, was not pleasantly impressed by the spectacle. Though not to be expected always, the cold snaps are now and then severe in those wilds. Indeed, at odd times a frost almost as rigorous as that of Alaska lays its icy

grip upon the mountains and the usually damp forests at their feet.

"I wish I could have got a man to go with us, but between the coal development and the logging, everybody's busy," he remarked.

"It doesn't matter," Vane assured him. "If we took a man along and came back unsuccessful, there'd be a risk of his giving the thing away. Besides, he might make trouble in other respects. A hired packer would probably kick against what you and I may have to put up with."

Carroll was far from pleased with this hint, but he let it pass.

"Do you mean that if you don't find the spruce this time, you'll go back again?"

"Yes; that's my intention. And now we may as well get the mainsail on her."

They got off shortly afterward and stood out to northward with the wind still ahead of them. It was a lowering day, and a short, tumbling sea was running. When late in the afternoon Carroll fixed their position by the bearing of a peak on the island, he pointed out the small progress they had made. The sloop was then plunging close-hauled through the vicious slate-green combers, and thin showers of spray flew all over her.

"The luck's been dead against us ever since we began this search," he commented.

"Do you believe in that kind of foolishness?" Vane inquired.

Carroll, sitting on the coaming, considered the question. It was not one of much importance, but the dingy sky and the dreary waste of sad-colored water

nad a depressing effect on him, and as it was a solace to talk, one topic would serve as well as another.

"I think I believe in a rhythmical recurrence of the contrary chance," he answered. "I mean that the uncertain and adverse possibility often turns up in succession for a time."

"Then you couldn't call it uncertain."

"You can't tell exactly when the break will come," Carroll explained. "But if I were a gambler or had other big risks, I think I'd allow for dangers in triplets."

"Yes," Vane responded; "you could cite the three extra big head seas, and I've noticed that when one burned tree comes down in a brûlée, it's quite often followed by two more, though there may be a number just ready to fall."

He mused for a few moments, with the spray whistling about him. He had three things at stake: Evelyn's favor; his interest in the Clermont Mine; and the timber he expected to find. Two of them were undoubtedly threatened, and he wondered gloomily if he might be bereft of all. Then he drove the forebodings out of his mind.

"In the present case, anyway, our course is pretty simple," he declared with a laugh. "We have only to hold out and go on until the luck changes."

Carroll knew that Vane was capable of doing as he had suggested and he was not encouraged by the prospect; but he went below to trim and bring up the lights, and soon afterward retired to get what rest he could. The locker cushions on which he lay felt unpleasantly damp; his blankets, which were not much drier, smelt moldy; and there was a dismal splash

and gurgle of water among the timbers of the plunging craft. Now and then a jet of it shot up between the joints of the flooring or spouted through the opening made for the lifting-gear in the centerboard trunk. When he had several times failed to plug the opening with a rag, Carroll gave it up and shortly afterward fell into fitful slumber.

He was awakened, shivering, by hearing Vane calling him, and scrambling out into the well, he took the helm as his comrade left it.

"What's her course?" he inquired.

"If you can keep her hammering ahead close-hauled on the port tack, it's all I ask," Vane laughed. "You needn't call me unless the sea gets steeper."

He crawled below; and it was a few minutes before Carroll, who was dazzled by the change from the dim lamplight, felt himself fit for his task. Fine spray whirled about him. It was pitch dark, but by degrees he made out the shadowy seas which came charging up, tipped with frothing white, upon the weather bow. By the way they broke on board it struck him that they were steep enough already, but Vane had seen them not long ago and there was nothing to be gained by expostulation if they caused him no anxiety. Several hours went by, and then Carroll noticed that the faint crimson blink which sometimes fell upon the seas to weather was no longer visible. It was evident that the port light had either gone out or been washed out, and it was his manifest duty to relight it. On the other hand, he could not do so unless Vane took the helm. He was wet and chilled through; any fresh effort was distasteful; he did not want to move; and he decided that they were most

unlikely to meet a steamer, while it was certain that there would be no other yacht about. He left the lamp alone, and at length Vane came up.

"What's become of the port light?" he demanded.

"That's more than I can tell you. It was burning an hour ago."

"An hour ago!" Vane broke out with disgusted indignation.

"It may have been a little longer. They've stopped the Alaska steamboats now, but of course there's no reason why you shouldn't light that lamp again, if it would give you any satisfaction. I'll stay up until you're through with it."

Vane did as he suggested, and immediately afterward Carroll retired below. He slept until a pale ray of sunshine crept in through the skylights, and then crawling out found the sloop lurching very slowly over a dying swell, with her deck and shaking mainsail white with frost. The wind had fallen almost dead away, and it was very cold.

"On the whole," he complained, "this is worse than the other thing."

Vane merely told him to get breakfast; and most of that day and the next one they drifted with the tides through narrowing waters, though now and then for a few hours they were wafted on by light and fickle winds. At length, they crept into the inlet where they had landed on the previous voyage, and on the morning after their arrival they set out on the march. There was on this occasion reason to expect more rigorous weather, and the load each carried was an almost crushing one. Where the trees were thinner the ground was frozen hard, and even in the densest

bush the undergrowth was white and stiff with frost, while overhead a forbidding gray sky hung.

On approaching the rift in the hillside at which he had glanced when they first passed that way, Vane stopped a moment.

"I looked into that place before, but it didn't seem worth while to follow it up," he said. "If you'll wait, I'll go a little farther along it."

Though the air was nipping, Carroll was content to remain where he was, and he spent some time sitting upon a log before a faint shout reached him. Then he rose and, making his way up the hollow, found his comrade standing upon a jutting ledge.

"I thought you were never coming! Climb up; I've something to show you!"

Carroll joined him with difficulty, and Vane stretched out his hand.

"Look yonder!"

Carroll looked and started. They stood in a rocky gateway with a river brawling down the chasm beneath them, but a valley opened up in front. Filled with somber forest, it ran back almost straight between stupendous walls of hills.

"It answers Hartley's description. After all, I don't think it's extraordinary that we should have taken so much trouble to push on past the right place."

"Why?"

Carroll sat down and filled his pipe.

"It's the natural result of possessing a temperament like yours. Somehow, you've got it firmly fixed into your mind that everything worth doing must be hard."

"I've generally found it so."

"I think," grinned Carroll, "you've generally made it so. There's a marked difference between the two. If any means of doing a thing looks easy, you at once conclude that it can't be the right one. That mode of reasoning has never appealed to me. In my opinion, it's more sensible to try the easiest method first."

"As a rule, that leads to your having to fall back upon the other one; and a frontal attack on a difficulty's often quicker than considering how you can work round its flank. In this case, I'll own we have wasted a lot of time and taken a good deal of trouble that might have been avoided. But are you going to sit here and smoke?"

"Until I've finished my pipe," Carroll answered firmly. "I expect we'll find tobacco, among other things, getting pretty scarce before this expedition ends."

He carried out his intention, and they afterward pushed on up the valley during the remainder of the day. It grew more level as they proceeded, and in spite of the frost, which bound the feeding snows, there was a steady flow of water down the river, which was free from rocky barriers. Vane now and then glanced at the river attentively, and when dusk was drawing near he stopped and fixed his gaze on the long ranks of trees that stretched away in front of him; fretted spires of somber greenery lifted high above a colonnade of mighty trunks.

"Does anything in connection with this bush strike you?" he asked.

"Its stiffness, if that's what you mean," Carroll answered with a smile. "These big conifers look as if they'd been carved, like the wooden trees in the

Swiss or German toys. They're impressive in a way, but they're too formally artificial."

"That's not what I mean," Vane said impatiently.

"To tell the truth, I didn't suppose it was. Anyway, these trees aren't spruce. They're red cedar; the stuff they make roofing shingles of."

"Precisely. Just now, shingles are in good demand in the Province, and with the wooden towns springing up on the prairie, western millers can hardly send roofing material across the Rockies fast enough. Besides this, I haven't struck a creek more adapted for running down logs, and the last sharp drop to tide-water would give power for a mill. I'm only puzzled that none of the timber-lease prospectors have recorded the place."

"That's easy to understand," laughed Carroll. "Like you, they'd no doubt first search the most difficult spots to get at."

They went on, and when darkness fell they pitched their light tent beside the creek. It was now freezing hard, and after supper the men lay smoking, wrapped in blankets, with the tent between them and the stinging wind, while a great fire of cedar branches snapped and roared in front of them. Sometimes the red blaze shot up, flinging a lurid light on the stately trunks and tinging the men's faces with the hue of burnished copper; sometimes it fanned out away from them while the sparks drove along the frozen ground and the great forest aisle, growing dim, was filled with drifting vapor. The latter was aromatic; pungently fragrant.

"It struck me that you were disappointed when you got no mail at Comox," Carroll remarked at

length, feeling that he was making something of a venture.

"I was," admitted Vane.

"That's strange," Carroll persisted, "because your hearing nothing from Nairn left you free to go ahead, which, one would suppose, was what you wanted."

Vane happened to be in a confidential mood; though usually averse to sharing his troubles, he felt that he needed sympathy.

"I'd better confess that I wrote Miss Chisholm a few lines from Nanaimo."

"And she didn't answer you? Now, I couldn't well help noticing that you were rather in her bad graces that night at Nairn's — the thing was pretty obvious. No doubt you're acquainted with the reason?"

"I'm not. That's just the trouble."

Carroll reflected. He had an idea that Miss Horsfield was somehow connected with the matter, but this was a suspicion he could not mention.

"Well," he said, "as I pointed out, you're addicted to taking the hardest way. When we came up here before, you marched past this valley, chiefly because it was close at hand; but I don't want to dwell on that. Has it occurred to you that you did something of the same kind when you were at the Dene? The way that was then offered you was easy."

Vane frowned.

"That is not the kind of subject one cares to talk about; but you ought to know that I couldn't allow them to force Miss Chisholm upon me against her will. It was unthinkable! Besides, looking at it in the most cold-blooded manner, it would have been

foolishness, for which we'd both have had to pay afterward."

"I'm not so sure of that," Carroll smiled. "There were the Sabine women, among other instances. Didn't they cut off their hair to make bowstring for their abductors?"

His companion made no comment, and Carroll, deciding that he had ventured as far as was prudent, talked of something else until they crept into the little tent and soon fell asleep.

They started with the first of the daylight, but the timber grew denser and more choked with underbrush as they proceeded and for a day or two they wearily struggled through it and the clogging masses of tangled, withered fern. Besides this, they were forced to clamber over mazes of fallen trunks, when the ragged ends of the snapped-off branches caught their loads. Their shoulders ached, their boots were ripped, their feet were badly galled; but they held on stubbornly, plunging deeper into the mountains all the while. It would probably overcome the average man if he were compelled to carry all the provisions he needed for a week along a well-kept road, but the task of the prospector and the survey packer, who must transport also an ax, cooking utensils and whatever protection he requires from the weather, through almost impenetrable thickets, is infinitely more difficult.

Vane and Carroll were more or less used to it, but both of them were badly jaded when soon after setting out one morning they climbed a clearer hillside to look about them. High up ahead, the crest of the white range gleamed dazzlingly against leaden clouds in a burst of sunshine; below, dark forest, still

wrapped in gloom, filled all the valley; and in between, a belt of timber touched by the light shone with a curious silvery luster. Though it was some distance off, probably a day's journey allowing for the difficulty of the march, Vane gazed at it earnestly. The trees were bare — there was no doubt of that, for the dwindling ranks, diminished by the distance, stood out against the snow-streaked rock like rows of thick needles set upright; their straightness and the way they glistened suggested the resemblance.

"Ominous, isn't it?" Carroll suggested at length. "If this is the valley Hartley came down — and everything points to that — we should be getting near the spruce."

Vane's face grew set.

"Yes," he agreed. "There has been a big fire up yonder; but whether it has swept the lower ground or not is more than I can tell. We'll find out to-night or early to-morrow."

He swung round without another word, and scrambling down the hillside they resumed the march. They pushed on all that day rather faster than before, with the same uncertainty troubling both of them. Forest fires are common in that region when there is a hot dry fall; and where, as often happens, a deep valley forms a natural channel for the winds that fan them, they travel far, stripping and charring the surface of every tree in their way. Neither of the men thought of stopping for a noonday meal, and during the gloomy afternoon, when dingy clouds rolled down from the peaks, they plodded forward with growing impatience. They could see scarcely a hundred yards in front of them; dense withering thickets

choked up the spaces between the towering trunks; and there was nothing to indicate that they were nearing the burned area when at last they pitched their camp as darkness fell.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE END OF THE SEARCH

THE two men made a hurried breakfast in the cold dawn, and soon afterward they were struggling through thick timber when the light suddenly grew clearer. Carroll remarked upon the fact and Vane's face hardened.

"We're either coming to a swamp, or the track the fire has swept is close in front," he explained.

A thicket lay before them, but they smashed savagely through the midst of it, the undergrowth snapping and crackling about their limbs. Then there was a network of tangled branches to be crossed, and afterward, reaching slightly clearer ground, they broke into a run. Three or four minutes later they stopped, breathless and ragged, with their rent boots scarcely clinging to their feet, and gazed eagerly about.

The living forest rose behind them, an almost unbroken wall, but ahead the trees ran up in detached and blackened spires. Their branches had vanished; every cluster of somber-green needles and delicate spray had gone; the great rampicks looked like shafts of charcoal. About their feet lay crumbling masses of calcined wood, which grew more numerous where there were open spaces farther on, and then the bare, black columns ran on again, up the valley and the steep hill benches on either hand. It was a weird

scene of desolation; impressive to the point of being appalling in its suggestiveness of wide-spread ruin.

For the space of a minute the men gazed at it; and then Vane, stretching out his hand, pointed to a snow-sheeted hill.

"That's the peak Hartley mentioned," he said in a voice which was strangely incisive. "Give me the ax!"

He took it from his comrade and striding forward attacked the nearest rampick. Twice the keen blade sank noiselessly overhead, scattering a black dust in the frosty air, and then there was a clear, ringing thud. After that, Vane smote on with a determined methodical swiftness, until Carroll grabbed his shoulder.

"Look out!" he cried. "It's going!"

Vane stepped back a few paces; the trunk reeled and rushed downward; there was a deafening crash, and they were enveloped in a cloud of gritty dust. Through the midst of it they dimly saw two more great trunks collapse; and then somewhere up the valley a series of thundering shocks, which both knew were not echoes, broke out. The sound jarred on Carroll's nerves, as the thud of the felled rampick had not done. Vane picked up one of the chips.

"We have found Hartley's spruce."

Carroll did not answer for a minute. After all, when defeat must be faced, there was very little to be said, though his companion's expression troubled him. Its grim stolidity was portentous.

"I suppose," he suggested hopefully, "nothing could be done with it?"

Vane pointed to the butt of the tree, which showed

a space of clear wood surrounded by a blackened rim.

"You can't make marketable pulp of charcoal, and the price would have to run pretty high before it would pay for ripping most of the log away to get at the residue.

"But there may be some unburned spruce farther on."

"It's possible. I'm going to find out."

This was a logical determination; but, in spite of his recent suggestion, Carroll realized that he would have abandoned the search there and then, had the choice been left to him, in which he did not think he was singular. After all they had undergone and the risk they had run in leaving Vancouver, the shock of the disappointment was severe. He could have faced a failure to locate the spruce, with some degree of philosophical calm; but to find it at last, useless, was very much worse. He did not, however, expect his companion to turn back yet; before he desisted, Vane would search for and examine every unburned tree. What was more, Carroll would have to accompany him. He noticed that Vane was waiting for him to speak, and he decided that this was a situation which he would better endeavor to treat lightly.

"I think I'll have a smoke," he said. "I'm afraid any remarks I could make wouldn't do justice to the occasion. Language has its limits."

He sat down on the charred log and took out his pipe.

"A brûlée's not a nice place to wander about in when there's any wind," he proceeded; "and I've an idea there's some coming, though it's still enough now."

Shut in, as they were, in the deep hollow with the towering snows above them, it was impressively still; and, in conjunction with the sight of the black desolation, the deep silence reacted on Carroll's nerves. He longed to escape from it, to make a noise; though this, if done unguardedly, might bring more of the rampicks thundering down. He could hear tiny flakes of charcoal falling from them and, though the fire had long gone out, a faint and curious crackling, as if the dead embers were stirring. He wondered if it were some effect of the frost; it struck him as disturbing and weird.

"We'll work right round the brûlée," Vane decided. "Then I suppose we'd better head back for Vancouver, though we'll look at that cedar as we go down. Something might be made of it — I'm not sure we've thrown our time away."

"You'd never be sure of that. It isn't in you."

Vane disregarded this. A new, constructive policy was already springing up out of the wreck of his previous plans.

"There's a good mill site on the inlet, but as it's a long way from the railroad we'll have to determine whether it would be cheaper to tow the logs down or split them up on the spot. I'll talk it over with Drayton; he'll no doubt be useful, and there's no reason why he shouldn't earn his share."

"Do you consider that the arrangement you made with Hartley applies to the cedar?" Carroll asked.

"Of course. I don't know that the other parties could insist on the original terms — we can discuss that later; but, though it may be modified, the arrangement stands."

His companion considered the matter dispassionately, as an abstract proposition. Here was a man, who in return for certain information respecting the whereabouts of a marketable commodity had undertaken to find and share it with his informant. The commodity had proved to be valueless, but during the search for it he had incidentally discovered something else. Was he under any obligation to share the latter with his informant's heirs?

Carroll decided that the question could be answered only in the negative; but he had no intention of disputing his comrade's point of view. In the first place, this would probably make Vane only more determined or would ruffle his temper; and, in the second place, Carroll was neither a covetous man nor an ambitious one, which, perhaps, was fortunate for him. Ambition, the mother of steadfast industry and heroic effort, has also a less reputable progeny.

Vane, as his partner realized, was ambitious; but in place of aspiring after wealth or social prominence, his was a different aim: to rend the hidden minerals from the hills, to turn forests into dressed lumber, to make something grow. Money is often, though not always, made that way; but, while Vane affected no contempt for it, in his case its acquisition was undoubtedly not the end. Fortunately, he was not altogether singular in this respect.

When he next spoke, however, there was no hint of altruistic sentiment in his curt inquiry:

"Are you going to sit there until you freeze?"

Carroll got up and they spent the remainder of the day plodding through the brûlée, with the result that when darkness fell Vane had abandoned all idea of

working the spruce. The next morning they set out for the inlet, and one afternoon during the journey they came upon several fallen logs lying athwart each other with their branches spread in an almost impenetrable tangle. Vane proceeded to walk along one log, which was tilted up several yards above the ground, balancing himself carefully upon the rounded surface, and Carroll followed cautiously. Suddenly there was a sharp snapping, and Vane plunged headlong into the tangle beneath, while Carroll stood still and laughed. It was not an uncommon accident.

Vane, however, did not reappear; nor was there any movement among the half-rotten boughs and withered sprays, and Carroll, moving forward hastily, looked down into the hole. He was disagreeably surprised to see his comrade lying, rather white in face, upon his side.

"I'm afraid you'll have to chop me out," came up hoarsely. "Get to work. I can't move my leg."

Moving farther along the log, Carroll dropped to the ground, which was less encumbered there, and spent the next quarter of an hour hewing a passage to his comrade. Then as he stood beside him, hot and panting, Vane looked up.

"It's my lower leg; the left," he explained. "Bone's broken; I felt it snap."

Carroll turned from him for a moment in consternation. Looking out between the branches, he could see the lonely hills tower, pitilessly white, against the blue of the frosty sky, and the rigid firs running back as far as his vision reached upon their lower slopes. There was no touch of life in all the picture; every-

thing was silent and absolutely motionless, and its desolation came near to appalling him. When he looked around again, Vane smiled wryly.

"If this had happened farther north, it would have been the end of me," he said. "As it is, it's awkward."

The word struck Carroll as singularly inexpressive, but he made an effort to gather his courage when his companion broke off with a groan of pain.

"It's lucky we helped that doctor when he set Pete's leg at Bryant's mill," he declared cheerily. "Can you wait a few minutes?"

Vane's face was beaded with damp now, but he tried to smile.

"It strikes me," he answered, "I'll have to wait a mighty long time."

Carroll turned and left him. He was afraid to stand still and think, and action was a relief. It was some time before he returned with several strips of fabric cut from the tent curtain, and the neatest splints he could extemporize from slabs of stripped-off bark; and the next half-hour was a trying one to both of them. Sometimes Vane assisted him with suggestions — once he reviled his clumsiness — and sometimes he lay silent with his face awry and his lips tight set; but at length it was done and Carroll stood up, breathing hard.

"I'll fasten you on to a couple of skids and pull you out. Then I'll make camp here."

He managed it with difficulty, pitched the tent above Vane, whom he covered with their blankets, and made a fire outside.

"Are you comfortable now?" he inquired.

Vane looked up at him with a somewhat ghastly smile.

"I suppose I'm about as comfortable as could be expected. Anyhow, I've got to get used to the thing. Six weeks is the shortest limit, isn't it?"

Carroll confessed that he did not know, and presently Vane spoke again.

"It's lucky that the winters aren't often very cold near the coast."

The temperature struck Carroll as low enough, but he made no comment. To his disgust, he could think of no cheering observation, for there was no doubt that the situation was serious. They were cut off from the sloop by leagues of tangled forest which a vigorous man would find it difficult to traverse, and it would be weeks before Vane could use his leg; no human assistance could be looked for; and they had only a small quantity of provisions left. Besides this, it would not be easy to keep the sufferer warm in rigorous weather.

"I'll get supper. You'll feel better afterward," he said at length.

"Don't be too liberal," Vane warned him.

After the meal, Vane fell into a restless doze, and it was dark when he opened his eyes again.

"I can't sleep any more, and we may as well talk — there are things to be arranged. In the first place, as soon as I feel a little easier you'll have to sail across to Comox and hire some men to pack me out. When you've sent them off, you can make for Vancouver and get a timber license and find out how matters are going on."

"That is quite out of the question," Carroll replied firmly. "Nairn can look after our mining interests — he's a capable man — and if the thing's too much for him, they can go to smash. Besides, they won't give you a timber license without full particulars of area and limits, and we've blazed no boundaries. Anyhow, I'm staying right here."

Vane began to protest, but Carroll raised his hand.

"Argument's not conducive to recovery. You're on your back, unfortunately, and I'll give way to you as usual as soon as you're on your feet again, but not before."

"I'd better point out that we'll both be hungry by that time. The provisions won't last long."

"Then I'll look for a deer as soon as I think you can be left. And now we'll try to talk of something more amusing."

"Can you see anything humorous in the situation?"

"I can't," Carroll confessed. "Still, there may be something of that description which I haven't noticed yet. By the way, the last time we were at Nairn's I happened to cross the room near where you and Miss Horsfield were sitting, and I heard her ask you to wait for something at Nanaimo or Comox. It struck me as curious."

"She told me to wait so that she could send me word to come back, if it should be needful."

"Ah!" ejaculated Carroll. "I won't ask why she was willing to do so — it concerns you more than me — but I think that as regards your interests in the Clermont a warning from her would be worth as much as one from Nairn; that is, if she could be depended on."

"Have you any doubt upon the subject?"

Carroll made a soothing gesture.

"Don't get angry! Perhaps I've talked too much. We have to think of your leg."

"I'm not likely to forget it," Vane informed him. "But I dare say you're right in one respect — as an amusing companion you're a dead failure; and talking isn't as easy as I thought."

He lay silent afterward, and though he had disclaimed any desire for sleep, worn by the march and pain as he was, his eyes presently closed. Carroll, however, sat long awake that night, and he afterward confessed that he felt badly afraid. Deer are by no means numerous in some parts of the bush — they had not seen one during the journey; and it was a long way to the sloop.

Once or twice, for no obvious reason, he drew aside the tent flap and looked out. The sky was cloudless and darkly blue, and a sickle moon gleamed in it, keen and clear with frost. Below, the hills were washed in silver, majestic, but utterly cheerless; and lower still the serrated tops of the rigid firs cut against the dreary whiteness. After each glimpse of them, Carroll drew his blanket tighter round him with a shiver. Very shortly, when the little flour and pork was gone and their few cartridges had been expended, he would be reduced to the condition of primitive man. Cut off from all other resources, he must then wrest what means of subsistence he could from the snowy wilderness by brute strength and cunning and such instruments as he could make with his unassisted hands, except that an ax of Pennsylvania steel was better than a stone one. Civilization has its compensations, and Carroll longed for a few more of them that night.

On rising the next morning, he found the frost keener, and he spent that day and a number of those that followed in growing anxiety, which was only temporarily lessened when he once succeeded in killing a deer. There was almost a dearth of animal life in the lonely valley. Sometimes, at first, Vane was feverish; often he was irritable; and the recollection of the three or four weeks he spent with him afterward haunted Carroll like a nightmare. At last, when he had spent several days in vain search for a deer and the provisions were almost exhausted, he and his companion held a council of emergency.

"There's no use in arguing," Vane declared. "You'll rig me a shelter of green boughs outside the tent and close to the fire. I can move from the waist upward and, if it's necessary, drag myself with my hands. Then you can chop enough cord-wood to last a while, cook my share of the eatables, and leave me while you go down to the sloop. There's half a bag of flour on board her, and a few other things I'd be uncommonly glad to have."

Carroll expostulated; but it was evident that his companion was right, and the next morning he started for the inlet, taking with him the smallest possible portion of their provisions. So long as he had enough to keep him from fainting on the way, it was all he required, because he could renew his stores on board the sloop. The weather broke during the march; driving snow followed him down the valley, and by and by gave place to bitter rain. The withered underbrush was saturated, the soil was soddened with melting snow, and after the first scanty meal or two the man dare risk no delay. He felt himself flagging

from insufficient food, and it was obvious that he must reach the sloop before he broke down. He had tobacco, but that failed to stay the gnawing pangs, and before the march was done he was on the verge of exhaustion, forcing himself onward, drenched and grim of face, scarcely able to keep upon his bleeding feet.

It was falling dusk and blowing fresh when he limped down the beach and with a last effort launched the light dingey and pulled off to the sloop. She rode rather deep in the water, but that did not trouble him. Most wooden craft leak more or less, and it was a considerable time since he had pumped her out. Clambering wearily on board, he made the dingey fast; and then stood still a moment or two, looking about him with his hand on the cabin slide. Thin flakes of snow drifted past him; the firs were rustling eerily ashore, and ragged wisps of cloud drove by low down above their tops. Little frothy ripples flecked the darkening water with streaks of white and splashed angrily against the bows of the craft. The prospect was oppressively dreary, and the worn-out man was glad that he was at last in shelter and could snatch a few hours' rest.

Thrusting back the slide, he stepped below and lighted the lamp. The brightening glow showed him that the boat's starboard side was wet high up, and though there was a good deal of water in her, this puzzled him until an explanation suggested itself. They had moored the craft carefully, but he supposed she must have dragged her anchor or kedge and swung in near enough the shore to ground toward low tide. Then as the tide left her she would fall over on her

starboard bilge, because they had lashed the heavy boom down on that side, and the water in her would cover the depressed portion of her interior. This reasoning was probably correct; but he did not foresee the result until, after lighting the stove and putting on the kettle, he opened the provision locker, which was to starboard. Then he saw with a shock of dismay that the stock of food they had counted on was ruined. The periodically-submerged flour-bag had rotted and burst, and most of its contents had run out into the water as the boat righted with the rising tide; the prepared cereals, purchased to save cooking, had turned to moldy pulp; and the few other stores were in much the same condition. There were only two sound cans of beef and a few ounces of unspoiled tea in a canister.

Carroll's courage failed him as he realized it, but he felt that he must eat and sleep before he could grapple with the situation. He would allow himself a scanty meal and a few hours' rest. While the kettle boiled, he crawled out and shortened in the cable and plied the pump. Then he went below and feasted on preserved beef and tea, gaging the size of each slice with anxious care, until he reluctantly laid the can aside. After that, he filled his pipe and stretching his aching limbs out on the port locker, which was comparatively dry, soon sank into heavy sleep.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### CARROLL SEEKS HELP

CARROLL slept for several hours before he awakened and sat up on the locker, shivering. He had left the hatch slightly open, and a confused uproar reached him from outside; the wail of wind-tossed trees; the furious splash of ripples against the bows; and the drumming of the halyards upon the mast. There was no doubt that it was blowing hard, but the wind was off the land and the sloop in shelter.

Filling his pipe, he set himself to think, and promptly decided that it would have been better had he gone down to the sloop in the beginning, before the provisions had been spoiled. A natural reluctance to leave his helpless companion had mainly prevented him from doing this, but he had also been encouraged by the possibility of obtaining a deer now and then. It was clear that he had made a mistake in remaining, but it was not the first time he had done so, and the point was unimportant. The burning question was — what should he do now.

It would obviously be useless to go back with rations that would barely suffice for the march. Vane still had food enough to keep life in one man for a little while, and it would not be a long run to Comox with a strong northerly wind. If the sloop would face the sea that was running he might return with

assistance before his comrade's scanty store was exhausted. Getting out the mildewed chart, he laid off his course, carefully trimmed and lighted the binnacle lamp, and going up on deck hauled in the kedge-anchor. He could not break the main one out, though he worked savagely with a tackle, and deciding to slip it, he managed to lash three reefs in the mainsail and hoist it with the peak left down. Then he stopped to gather breath — for the work had been cruelly heavy — before he let the cable run and hoisted the jib.

She paid off when he put up his helm, and the black loom of trees ashore vanished. He thought that he could find his way out of the inlet, but he knew that he had done so only when the angry ripples that splashed about the boat suddenly changed to confused tumbling combers. They foamed up in quick succession on her quarter, but he fancied she would withstand their onslaught so long as he could prevent her from screwing up to windward when she lifted. It would need constant care, and if he failed, the next comber would, no doubt, break on board. His task was one that would have taxed the vigilance of a strong, well-fed man, and Carroll had already nearly reached the limit of his powers.

His case, however, was by no means an unusual one. The cost of the subjugation of the wilderness is the endurance of hunger and thirst, cold and crushing fatigue; and somebody pays, to the utmost farthing. Carroll sitting, drenched, strung up and hungry, at the helm, was merely playing his part in the struggle, though he found it cruelly difficult.

It was pitch dark, but he must gaze ahead and guess the track of the pursuing seas by the angle of the

spouting white ridge abreast of the weather shrouds. He had a compass, but when his course did not coincide with safety it must be disregarded. The one essential thing was to keep the sloop on top, and to do so he had frequently to let her fall off dead before the mad white combers that leaped out of the dark. By and by his arms began to ache from the strain of the tiller, and his wet fingers grew stiff and claw-like. The nervous strain was also telling, but that could not be helped; he must keep the craft before the sea or go down with her. There was one consolation; she was traveling at a furious speeed.

At length, morning broke, gray and lowering, over a leaden sea that was seamed with white. Carroll glanced longingly at the meat can on the locker near his feet. He could reach it by stooping, though he dare not leave the helm, but he determined to wait until noon before he broke his fast again. It could not be very far to Comox, but the wind might drop. Then he began to wonder how he had escaped the perils of the night. He had come down what was really a wide and not quite straight sound, passing several unlighted islands. Before starting, he had decided that he would run so far, and then change his course a point or two, but he could not be sure that he had done so. He had a hazy recollection of seeing surf, and once a faint loom of land, but he supposed that he had avoided it half-consciously or that chance had favored him.

In the afternoon, the wind changed a little, backing to the northwest; the sky grew brighter, and Carroll made out shadowy land over his starboard quarter. Soon he recognized it with a start. It was the high

ridge north of Comox. He had run farther than he had expected, and he must try to hoist the peak of the mainsail and haul her on the wind. There was danger in rounding her up, but it must be faced, though a sea foamed across her as he put down his helm. Another followed, but he scrambled forward and struggled desperately to hoist the down-hanging gaff. The halyards were swollen; and he could scarcely keep his footing on the deluged deck that slanted steeply under him. He thought he could have mastered the banging canvas had he been fresh; but worn out as he was, drenched with spray and buffeted by the shattered tops of the seas, the task was beyond his power. Giving it up, he staggered back, breathless and almost nerveless, to the helm.

He could not reach Comox, which lay to windward, with the sail half set, but it was only seventy miles or so to Nanaimo and not much farther to Vancouver. The breeze would be fair to either, and he could charter a launch or tug for the return journey. Letting her go before the sea again, he ate some canned meat ravenously, tearing it with one hand.

During the afternoon, a gray mass rose out of the water to port and he supposed it was Texada. There were mines on the island and he might be able to engage a rescue party; but he reflected that he could not beat the sloop back to windward unless the breeze fell, which it showed no signs of doing. It would be more prudent to go on to Vancouver, where he would be sure of getting a steamer; but he closed with the long island a little, and dusk was falling when he made out a boat in the partial shelter of a bight. Standing in closer, he saw that there were two men on the craft,

and driving down upon her he backed and ran alongside. There was a crash as he struck the boat and an astonished and angry man clutched the sloop's rail.

"Now what in the name of thunder —" he began and stopped, struck by Carroll's haggard and ragged appearance.

"Can you take this sloop to Vancouver?" Carroll asked hoarsely.

"I could if it was worth while," was the cautious answer. "It will be a mighty wet run."

"Seven dollars a day, until you're home again. A bonus, if you can sail her with the whole reefed mainsail up — I won't stick at a few dollars. Can your partner pull that boat ashore alone? If not, cast her adrift; I'll buy her."

"He'll make the beach," returned the other, jumping on board. "Seven dollars sounds a square deal. I won't put the screw on you."

"Then help me hoist the peak. After that, you can take the helm; I'm played out."

The man shouted something to his companion and then seized the halyards, and the sloop drove on again, furiously, with an increased spread of canvas, while Carroll stood holding on by the coaming until the boat dropped back.

"I'll leave you to it," he told the new helmsman. "It's twenty-four hours since I've had more than a bite or two of food, and some weeks since I had a decent meal."

"You look it. Been up against it somewhere?"

Carroll, without replying, crawled below and managed to light the stove and make a kettleful of tea.

He drank a good deal of it, and nearly emptied the remaining small meat can, which he presently held out for the helmsman's inspection, standing beneath the hatch.

"There's some tea left, but this is all there is to eat on board the craft," he said. "You're hired to take her to Vancouver — you'd better get there as quick as you can."

The bronzed helmsman nodded.

"She won't be long on the way if the mast holds up."

"Have you seen any papers lately?" Carroll inquired. "I've been up in the bush and I'm interested in the Clermont Mine. It looked as if there might be some changes in the company's prospects when I went away."

"I noticed a bit about it in the *Colonist* a while back. The company sold out to another concern, or amalgamated with it; I don't remember which."

Carroll was not astonished. The news implied that he must be prepared to face a more or less serious financial reverse, and it struck him as a fitting climax to his misadventures.

"It's pretty much what I expected," he said. "I'm going to sleep and I don't want to be wakened before it's necessary."

He crawled below, and he had hardly stretched himself out upon the locker before his eyes closed. When he opened them, feeling more like his usual self, he saw that the sun was above the horizon, and he recognized by the boat's motion that the wind had fallen. Going out he found her driving through the water under her whole mainsail and the helmsman sitting

stolidly at the tiller. The man stretched out a hand and pointed to the hazy hills to port.

"We'll fetch the Narrows some time before noon. If you'll take the helm, I guess we'll half that meat for breakfast."

His prediction proved correct, for Carroll reached his hotel about midday, and hastily changing his clothes set off to call on Nairn. He had not yet recovered his mental equipoise and, in spite of his long, sound sleep, he was still badly jaded physically. On arriving at the house, he was shown into a room where Mrs. Nairn and her husband were sitting with Evelyn, waiting for the midday meal. The elder lady rose with a start of astonishment when he walked in.

"Man," she cried, "what's wrong? Ye're looking like a ghost."

It was not an inapt description. Carroll's face was worn and haggard, and his clothes hung slack upon him.

"I've been feeling rather unsubstantial of late, as the result of a restricted diet," he answered with a smile, sinking into the nearest chair.

Nairn regarded him with carefully suppressed curiosity.

"Ye're over lang in coming," he remarked. "Where left ye your partner?"

Carroll sat silent a moment or two, his eyes fixed on Evelyn. It was evident that his sudden appearance unaccompanied by Vane, which he felt had been undesirably dramatic, had alarmed her. At first, he felt compassionate, and then he was suddenly possessed by hot indignation. This girl, with her narrow prudish notions and dispassionate nature, had pre-

sumed to condemn his comrade, unheard, for an imaginary offense. The thing was at once ludicrous and intolerable; if his news brought her dismay, let her suffer. His nerves, it must be remembered, were not in their normal condition.

"Yes," he said, in answer to his host's first remark; "I've gathered that we have failed to save the situation. But I don't know exactly what has happened. You had better tell me."

Mrs. Nairn made a sign of protest, but her husband glanced at her restrainingly.

"Ye will hear his news in good time," he informed her, and then turned to Carroll. "In a few words, the capital was no subscribed — it leaked out that the ore was running poor — and we held an emergency meeting. With Vane away, I could put no confidence into the shareholders — they were anxious to get from under — and Horsfield brought forward an amalgamation scheme: A combine would take the property over, on their valuation. I and a few others were outvoted; the scheme went through; and when the announcement steadied the stock, which had been tumbling down, I exercised the authority given me and sold your shares and Vane's at considerably less than their face value. Ye can have particulars later. What I have to ask now is — where is Vane?"

The man's voice grew sharp; the question was flung out like an accusation; but Carroll still looked at Evelyn. He felt very bitter against her; he would not soften the blow.

"I left him in the bush, with no more than a few days' provisions and a broken leg," he announced.

Then, in spite of Evelyn's efforts to retain her com-

posure, her face blanched. Carroll's anger vanished, because the truth was clear. Vane had triumphed through disaster; his peril and ruin had swept his offenses away. The girl, who had condemned him in his prosperity, would not turn from him in misfortune. In the meanwhile the others sat silent, gazing at the bearer of evil news, until he spoke again.

"I want a tug to take me back, at once, if she can be got. I'll pick up a few men along the waterfront."

Nairn rose and went out of the room. The tinkle of a telephone bell reached those who remained, and a minute or two later he came back.

"I've sent Whitney round," he explained. "He'll come across if there's a boat to be had, and now ye look as if ye needed lunch."

"It's several weeks since I had one," Carroll smiled.

The meal was brought in, but for a while he talked as well as ate, relating his adventures in somewhat disjointed fragments, while the others sat listening eagerly. He was also pleased to notice something which suggested returning confidence in him in Evelyn's intent eyes as the tale proceeded. When at last he had made the matter clear, he added:

"If I keep you waiting, you'll excuse me."

His hostess watched his subsequent efforts with candid approval, and looking up once or twice, he saw sympathy in the girl's face, instead of the astonishment or disgust he had half expected. When he finished, his hostess rose and Carroll stood up, but Nairn motioned to him to resume his place.

"I'm thinking ye had better sit still a while and smoke," he said.

Carroll was glad to do so, and he and Nairn conferred together until the latter was called to telephone.

"Ye can have the Brodick boat at noon to-morrow," he reported on his return.

"That won't do," Carroll objected heavily. "Send Whitney round again; I must sail to-night."

He had some difficulty in getting out the words, and when he rose his eyes were half closed. Walking unsteadily, he crossed the room and sank onto a big lounge.

"I think," he added, "if you don't mind, I'll go to sleep."

Nairn merely nodded, and when he went silently out of the room a minute or two afterward, the worn-out man was already wrapped in profound slumber. Nairn just then received another call by telephone and left in haste for his office without speaking to his wife, with the result that Mrs. Nairn and Evelyn, returning to the room in search of Carroll, found him lying still. The elder lady raised her hand in warning as she bent over the sleeper, and then taking up a light rug spread it gently over him. Evelyn, too, was stirred to sudden pity, for the man's attitude was eloquent of exhaustion. They withdrew softly and had reached the corridor outside when Mrs. Nairn turned to the girl.

"When he first came in, ye blamed that man for deserting his partner," she said.

Evelyn confessed it and her hostess smiled meaningly.

"Are ye no rather too ready to blame?"

"I'm afraid I am," Evelyn admitted, with the color creeping into her face as she remembered another instance in which she had condemned a man hastily.

"In this case, ye were very foolish. The man came down for help, and if he could no get it, he would go back his lone, if all the way was barred with ice and he must walk on his naked feet. Love of woman's strong and the fear of death is keen, but ye will find now and then a faith between man and man that neither would sever." She paused and looked at the girl fixedly as she asked: "What of him that could inspire it?"

Evelyn did not answer. She had never seen her hostess in this mood, and she also was stirred; but the elder lady went on again:

"The virtue of a gift lies in part, but no altogether, with the giver. Whiles, it may be bestowed unworthily, but I'm thinking it's no often. The bond that will drag Carroll back to the North again, to his death, if need be, has no been spun from nothing."

Evelyn had no doubt that Mrs. Nairn was right. Loyalty, most often, demanded a worthy object to tender service to; it sprang from implicit confidence, mutual respect and strong appreciation. It was not without a reason that Vane had inspired it in his comrade's breast; and this was the man she had condemned. That fact, however, was by comparison a very minor trouble. Vane was lying, helpless and alone, in the snowy wilderness, in peril of his life; and she knew that she loved him. She realized now, when it might be too late, that had he in reality been stained with dishonor, she could have forgiven him. Indeed, it had only been by a painful effort that she had maintained some show of composure since Carroll had brought the disastrous news, and she felt that she could not keep it up much longer.

What she said to Mrs. Nairn she could not remember, but escaping from her she retired to her own room, to lie still and grapple with an agony of fear and contrition.

It was two hours later when she went down and found Carroll, who still looked drowsy, about to go out. His hostess had left him for a moment in the hall, and meeting the girl's eyes, he smiled at her reassuringly.

"Don't be anxious. I'll bring him back," he said.

Then Mrs. Nairn appeared and in a few moments Carroll left without another word to Evelyn. She did not ask herself why he had taken it for granted that she would be anxious; she was beyond any petty regard for appearances then. It was consoling to remember that he was Vane's tried comrade; a man who kept his word.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### JESSY'S CONTRITION

AFTER leaving Mrs. Nairn, Carroll walked toward Horsfield's residence in a thoughtful mood, because he felt it incumbent upon him to play a part he was not particularly fitted for in a somewhat delicate matter. Uncongenial as his task was, it was one that could not be left to Vane, who was even less to be trusted with the handling of such affairs; and Carroll had resolved, as he would have described it, to straighten out things.

His partner had somehow offended Evelyn, and though she was now obviously disposed to forgive him, the recollection of his supposititious iniquity might afterward rankle in her mind. Though Vane was innocent of any conduct to which she could with reason take exception, it was first of all needful to ascertain the exact nature of the charge against him. Carroll, who for several reasons had preferred not to press this question upon Evelyn, had a strong suspicion that Jessy Horsfield was at the bottom of the trouble. There was also one clue to follow — Vane had paid the rent of Celia Hartley's shack, and he wondered whether Jessy could by any means have heard of it. If she had done so, the matter would be simplified, for he had a profound distrust of her. A recent action of hers was, he thought, sufficient to justify this attitude.

He found her at home, reclining gracefully in an

easy-chair in her drawing-room, and though she did not seem astonished to see him, he fancied that her expression hinted at suppressed concern.

"I heard that you had arrived alone, and I intended to make inquiries from Mrs. Nairn as soon as I thought she would be at liberty," she informed him.

Carroll had found the direct attack effective in Evelyn's case, and he determined to try it again.

"Then," he declared, "it says a good deal for your courage."

He never doubted that she possessed courage, and she displayed it now.

"So," she said calmly, "you have come as an enemy."

"Not exactly; it didn't seem worth while. Though there's no doubt you betrayed us — Vane waited for the warning you could have sent — so far as it concerns our ruined interests in the Clermont, the thing's done and can't be mended. We'll let that question go. The most important point is that if you had recalled us, as you promised, Vane would now be safe and sound."

This shot told. The girl's face became less imperturbable; there was eagerness and, he thought, a hint of fear in it.

"Then has any accident happened to him?"

"He's lying in the bush, helpless, in imminent peril of starvation."

"Go on!"

There were signs of strain clearly perceptible in the girl's voice. Carroll was brief, but he made her understand the position; then she turned upon him imperiously.

"Then why are you wasting your time here?"

"It's a reasonable question. I can't get a tug to take me back until noon to-morrow."

"Ah!" murmured Jessy. "Excuse me for a minute."

She left him astonished. He had not expected her to take him at a disadvantage, as she had done with her previous thrust, and now he did not think that she had slipped away to hide her feelings. That did not seem necessary in Jessy's case, though he believed she was more or less disturbed. She came back presently, looking calm, and sat down again.

"My brother will be here in a quarter of an hour," she informed him. "Things are rather slack, and he had half promised to take me for a drive. I have just called him up."

Carroll did not see how this bore upon the subject of their conversation, but he left her to take the lead.

"Did Mr. Vane tell you that I had promised to warn him?" she asked.

"To do him justice, he let it out before he quite realized what he was saying. I'd better own that I partly surprised him into giving me the information."

"The expedient seems a favorite one with you. I suppose no news of what has happened here can have reached him?"

"None. If it's any consolation, he has still an unshaken confidence in you," Carroll assured her with blunt bitterness.

The girl showed faint signs of confusion, but she sat silent for the next few moments. During that time it flashed upon Carroll with illuminating light that he had heard Celia Hartley say that Miss Horsfield

had found her orders for millinery. This confirmed his previous suspicion that Jessy had discovered who had paid the rent of Celia's shack, and that she had with deliberate malice informed Evelyn, distorting her account so that it would tell against Vane. There were breaks in the chain of reasoning which led him to this conclusion, but he did not think that Jessy would shrink from such a course, and he determined to try a chance shot.

"Vane's inclined to be trustful, and his rash generosity has once or twice got him into trouble," he remarked, and went on as if an explanation were needed: "It's Miss Hartley's case I'm thinking about just now. I've an idea he asked you to look after her. Am I right?"

As soon as he had spoken he knew that he had hit the mark. Jessy did not openly betray herself, but there are not many people who can remain absolutely unmoved when unexpectedly asked a startling question. Besides, the man was observant, and had all his faculties strung up for the encounter. He saw one of her hands tighten on the arm of her chair and a hint of uneasiness in her eyes, and that sufficed him.

"Yes," she replied; "I recommended her to some of my friends. I understand that she is getting along satisfactorily."

Carroll felt compelled to admire her manner. He believed that she loved his comrade but had nevertheless tried to ruin him in a fit of jealous rage. She was, no doubt, now keenly regretting her success, but though he thought she deserved to suffer, she was bravely facing the trying situation. It was one that

was rife with dramatic possibilities, and he was grateful to her for avoiding them.

"You are going back to-morrow," she said after a brief silence. "I suppose you will have to tell your partner — what you have discovered here — as soon as you reach him?"

Carroll had not intended to spare her, but now he felt almost compassionate, and he had one grain of comfort to offer.

"I must tell him that his shares in the Clermont have been sacrificed. I wonder if that is all you meant?"

Jessy met his inquiring gaze with something very much like an appeal, and then she spread out her hands in a manner that seemed to indicate that she threw herself upon his mercy.

"It is not all I meant," she confessed.

"Then if it's any relief to you, I'll confine myself to telling him that he has been deprived of his most valuable property. I dare say the news will hit him hard enough. He may afterward discover other facts for himself, but on the whole I shouldn't consider it likely. As I said, he's confiding and slow to suspect."

He read genuine gratitude, which he had hardly expected, in the girl's face; but he raised his hand and went on in the rather formal manner which he felt was the only safe one to assume:

"I had, perhaps, better mention that I am going to call on Miss Hartley. After that, I shall be uncommonly thankful to start back for the bush." He paused and concluded with a sudden trace of humor: "I'll own

that I feel more at home with the work that awaits me there."

Jessy made a little gesture which, while it might have meant anything, was somehow very expressive. Just then there were footsteps outside and the next moment Horsfield walked into the room.

"So you're back!"

"Yes," Carroll replied shortly. "Beaten at both ends — there's no use in hiding it."

Horsfield showed no sign of satisfaction, and Carroll afterward admitted that the man behaved very considerately.

"Well," he declared, "though you may be astonished to hear it, I'm sorry. Unfortunately, our interests clashed, and I naturally looked after mine. Once upon a time I thought I could have worked hand in hand with Vane, but our ideas did not coincide, and your partner is not the man to yield a point or listen to advice."

Carroll was aware that Horsfield had by means which were far from honorable deprived him of a considerable portion of his possessions. He had also betrayed his fellow shareholders in the Clermont Mine, selling their interests, doubtless for a tempting consideration, to the directors of another company. For all that, Carroll recognized that since he and Vane were beaten, as he had confessed, recriminations and reproaches would be useless as well as undignified. He preferred to face defeat calmly.

"It's the fortunes of war," he returned. "What you say about Vane is more or less correct; but, although it is not a matter of much importance now, it

was impossible from the beginning that your views and his ever should agree."

Horsfield smiled.

"Too great a difference of temperament? I dare say you're right. Vane measures things by a different standard — mine's perhaps more adapted to the market-place. But where have you left him?"

"In the bush. Miss Horsfield will, no doubt, give you particulars; I've just told her the tale."

"She called me up at the office and asked me to come across at once. Will you excuse us for a few minutes?"

They went out together, and Jessy presently came back alone and looked at Carroll in a diffident manner.

"I suppose," she began, "one could hardly expect you to think of either of us very leniently; but I must ask you to believe that I am sincerely distressed to hear of your partner's accident. It was a thing I could never have anticipated; but there are amends I can make. Every minute you can save is precious, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Then I can get you a tug. My brother tells me the *Atlin* is coming across from Victoria and should be here early this evening. He has gone back to the office to secure her for you, though she was fixed to go off for a lumber boom."

"Thank you," responded Carroll. "It's a very great service. She's a powerful boat."

Jessy hesitated.

"I think my brother would like to say a few words when he comes back. Can I offer you some tea?"

"I think not," answered Carroll, smiling. "For one thing, if I sit still much longer, I shall, no doubt, go to sleep again, as I did at Nairn's; and that would be neither seemly nor convenient, if I'm to sail this evening. Besides, now that we've arranged an armistice, it might be wiser not to put too much strain on it."

"An armistice?"

"I think that describes it." Carroll's manner grew significant. "The word implies a cessation of hostilities — on certain terms."

Jessy could take a hint, and his meaning was clear. Unless she forced him to do so, he would not betray her to his comrade, who might never discover the part she had played; but he had given her a warning, which might be bluntly rendered as "Hands off." There was only one course open to her — to respect it. She had brought down the man she loved, but it was clear that he was not for her, and now that the unreasoning fury which had driven her to strike had passed, she was troubled with contrition. There was nothing left except to retire from the field, and it was better to do so gracefully. For all that, there were signs of strain in her expression as she capitulated.

"Well," she said, "I have given you proof that you have nothing to fear from me. My brother is the only man in Vancouver who could have got you that tug for this evening; I understand that the sawmill people are very much in need of the lumber she was engaged to tow."

She held out her hand and Carroll took it, though he had not expected to part from her on friendly terms.

"I owe you a good deal for that," he smiled.

His task, however, was only half completed when he left the house, and the remaining portion was the more difficult, but he meant to finish it. He preferred to take life lightly; he had trifled with it before disaster had driven him out into the wilds; but there was resolution in the man, and he could force himself to play an unpleasant part when it was needful. Fortune also favored him, as she often does those who follow the boldest course.

He had entered a busy street when he met Kitty and Celia. The latter looked thin and somewhat pale, but she was moving briskly, and her face was eager when she shook hands with him.

"We have been anxious about you," she declared; "there was no news. Is Mr. Vane with you? How have you got on?"

"We found the spruce," answered Carroll. "It's not worth milling — a forest fire has wiped out most of it — but we struck some shingling cedar we may make something of."

"Where's Mr. Vane?"

"In the bush. I've a good deal to tell you about him; but we can't talk here. I wonder if we could find a quiet place in a restaurant, or if the park would be better."

"The park," said Kitty decidedly.

They reached it in due time, and Carroll, who had refused to say anything about Vane on the way, found the girls a seat in a grove of giant firs and sat down opposite to them. Though it was winter, the day, as is often the case near Vancouver, was pleasantly mild.

"Now," he began, "my partner is a singularly unfortunate person. In the first place, the transfer of the Clermont property, which you have no doubt heard of, means a serious loss to him, though he is not ruined yet. He talks of putting up a shingling mill, in which Drayton will be of service, and if things turn out satisfactorily you will be given an interest in it."

He added the last sentence as an experiment, and was satisfied with the result.

"Never mind our interests," cried Kitty. "What about Mr. Vane?"

For the third time since his arrival, Carroll made the strongest appeal he could to womanly pity, drawing, with a purpose, a vivid picture of his comrade's peril and suffering. Nor was he disappointed, for he saw consternation, compassion and sympathy in the girls' faces. So far, the thing had been easy, but now he hesitated, and it was with difficulty that he nerved himself for what must follow.

"He has been beaten out of his stock in the mine; he's broken down in health and in danger; but, by comparison, that doesn't count for very much with him. He has another trouble; and though I'm afraid I'm going out of the way in mentioning it, if it could be got over, it would help him to face the future and set him on his feet again."

Then he briefly recounted the story of Vane's regard for Evelyn, making the most of his sacrifice in withdrawing from the field, and again he realized that he had acted wisely. A love affair appealed to his listeners, and there was a romance in this one that heightened the effect of it.

"But Miss Chisholm can't mean to turn from him now," interrupted Celia.

Carroll looked at her meaningly.

"No; she turned from him before he sailed. She heard something about him."

His companions appeared astonished.

"She couldn't have heard anything that anybody could mind," Kitty exclaimed indignantly. "He's not that kind of man."

"It's a compliment," returned Carroll. "I think he deserves it. At the same time, he's a little rash, and now and then a man's generosity is open to misconception. In this case, I don't think one could altogether blame Miss Chisholm."

Kitty glanced at him sharply and then at Celia, who looked at first puzzled and then startled. Then the blood surged into Kitty's cheeks.

"Oh!" she gasped, as if she were breathless, "I was once afraid of something like this. You mean we're the cause of it?"

The course he followed was hateful to Carroll, but the tangle could not be straightened without having somebody's feelings hurt, and it was his comrade about whom he was most concerned.

"I believe that you understand the situation," he said quietly.

He saw the fire in Kitty's eyes and noticed that Celia's face also was flushed, but he did not think their anger was directed against him. They knew the world they lived in, and, for that matter, he could share their indignation. He resented the fact that a little thing should bring swift suspicion upon them. He was, however, not required to face any discon-

certing climax. Indeed, it struck him as curious that a difficult situation in which strong emotion was stirred up could become so tamely prosaic merely because it was resolutely handled in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Well," inquired Celia, "why did you tell us this?"

"I think you both owe Vane something, and you can do him a great favor just now."

Kitty looked up at him.

"Don't ask me too much, Mr. Carroll. I'm Irish, and I feel like killing somebody."

"It's natural," responded Carroll with a sympathetic smile. "I've now and then felt much the same way; it's probably unavoidable in a world like this. However, I think you ought to call on Miss Chisholm, after I've gone, though you'd better not mention that I sent you. You can say you came for news of Vane — and add anything that you consider necessary."

The girls looked at each other, and at length, though it obviously cost her a struggle, Kitty said decidedly:

"We will have to go."

Then she faced round toward Carroll.

"If Miss Chisholm won't believe us, she'll be sorry we came!"

Carroll made her a slight inclination.

"She'll deserve it, if she's not convinced. But it might be better if you didn't approach her in the mood you're in just now."

Kitty rose, motioning to Celia, and Carroll turned back with them toward the city, feeling a certain constraint in their company and yet conscious of a strong relief. It had grown dark when he returned to Nairn's house.

"Where have ye been?" his host inquired. "I had a clerk seeking ye all round the city. I canna get ye a boat before the morn."

Carroll saw that Mrs. Nairn shared her husband's desire to learn how he had been occupied. Evelyn also was in the room, and she waited expectantly for his answer.

"There were one or two little matters that required attention and I managed to arrange them satisfactorily," he explained. "Among other things, I've got a tug, and I expect to sail in an hour or two. Miss Horsfield found me the vessel."

He noticed Evelyn's interest, and was rather pleased to see it. If she were disposed to be jealous of Jessy it could do no harm. Nairn, however, frowned.

"I'm thinking it might have been better if ye had no troubled Jessy," he commented.

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you," Carroll retorted. "The difference between this evening and noon to-morrow is a big consideration."

"Weel," replied Nairn resignedly; "I can no deny the thing, if ye look at it like that."

Carroll changed the subject; but some time later Mrs. Nairn sat down near him in the temporary absence of her husband and Evelyn.

"We will no be disturbed for two or three minutes," she said. "Ye answered Alic like a Scotsman before supper and put him off the track, though that's no so easy done."

Carroll grinned. He enjoyed an encounter with Mrs. Nairn, though she was, as a rule, more than a match for him.

"You're too complimentary," he declared. "The

genuine Caledonian caution can't be acquired by outsiders; it's a gift."

"I'll no practise it now," returned the lady. "Ye're no so proud of yourself for nothing. What have ye been after?"

Carroll crossed his finger-tips and looked at her over them.

"Since you ask the question, I may say this — If Miss Chisholm has two lady visitors during the next few days, you might make sure that she sees them."

"What are their names?"

"Miss Celia Hartley, the daughter of the prospector who sent Vane off to look for the timber, and Miss Kitty Blake, who, as you have probably heard, once came down the west coast with him, in company with an elder lady and myself."

Mrs. Nairn started, then she looked thoughtful, and finally she broke into a smile of open appreciation.

"Now," she ejaculated, "I understand. I did no think it of ye. Ye're no far from a genius!"

"Thanks. I believe I succeeded better than I could have expected, and perhaps than I deserved."

They were interrupted then by Nairn, who came hastily into the room.

"There's one of the *Atlin* deck-hands below," he announced. "He's come on here from Horsfield's to say that the boat's ready with a full head of steam up, and the packers ye hired are waiting on the wharf."

Carroll rose and became in a moment intent and eager.

"Tell him I'll be down almost as soon as he is. You'll have to excuse me."

Two minutes later he left the house, and fervent good wishes followed him from the party on the stoop. He did not stop to acknowledge them, but shortly afterward the blast of a whistle came ringing across the roofs from beside the water-front.

## CHAPTER XXX

### CONVINCING TESTIMONY

ONE afternoon three or four days after Carroll had sailed, Evelyn sat alone in Mrs. Nairn's drawing-room, a prey to confused regrets and keen anxiety. She had recovered from the first shock caused her by Carroll's news, but though she could face the situation more calmly, she could find no comfort anywhere — Vane was lying, helpless and famishing, in the frost-bound wilderness. She knew that she loved the man; indeed, she had really known it for some time, and it was that which had made Jessy's revelation so bitter. Now, fastidious in thought and feeling as she was, she wondered whether she had been too hard upon him; it was becoming more and more difficult to believe that he could have justified her disgust and anger; but this was not what troubled her most. She had sent him away with cold disfavor. Now he was threatened by dangers. It was horrible to think of what might befall him before assistance arrived, and yet she could not drive the haunting dread out of her mind.

She was in this mood when a maid announced that two visitors wished to see her; and when they were shown in, she found it difficult to hide her astonishment as she recognized in Kitty the very attractive girl she had once seen in Vane's company. It was this

which prompted her to assume a chilling manner, though she asked her guests to be seated. Neither of them appeared altogether at her ease, and there was, indeed, a rather ominous sparkle in Kitty's blue eyes.

"Mr. Carroll was in town not long ago," Kitty began bluntly. "Have you had any news of him since he sailed?"

Evelyn did not know what to make of the question, and she answered coldly.

"No; we do not expect any word for some time."

"I'm sorry. We're anxious about Mr. Vane."

On the surface, the announcement appeared significant, but the girl's boldness in coming to her for news was inexplainable to Evelyn. Puzzled as she was, her attitude became more discouraging.

"You know him then?"

Something in her tone made Celia's cheeks burn and she drew herself up.

"Yes," she said; "we know him, both of us. I guess it's astonishing to you. But I met him first when he was poor, and getting rich hasn't spoiled Mr. Vane."

Evelyn was once more puzzled. The girl's manner savored less of assurance than of wholesome pride which had been injured. Kitty then broke in:

"We had no cards to send in; but I'm Kathleen Blake, and this is Celia Hartley — it was her father sent Mr. Vane off to look for the spruce."

"Ah!" exclaimed Evelyn, a little more gently, addressing Celia. "I understand that your father died."

Kitty flashed a commanding glance at Celia.

"Yes," the girl replied; "that is correct. He left me ill and worn out, without a dollar, and I don't

know what I should have done if Mr. Vane hadn't insisted on giving Drayton a little money for me; on account, he said, because I was a partner in the venture. Then Miss Horsfield got some work among her friends for me to do at home. Mr. Vane must have asked her to; it would be like him."

Evelyn sat silent a few moments. Celia had given her a good deal of information in answer to a very simple remark; but she was most impressed by the statement that Jessy, who had prejudiced her against Vane, had helped the girl at his request. It was difficult to believe that she would have done so had there been any foundation for her insinuations. If Celia spoke the truth, and Evelyn somehow felt this was the case, the whole thing was extraordinary.

"Now," continued Celia, "it's no way astonishing that I'm grateful to Mr. Vane and anxious to hear whether Mr. Carroll has reached him." This was spoken with a hint of defiance, but the girl's voice changed.

"I am anxious. It's horrible to think of a man like him freezing in the bush."

Her concern was so genuine and yet somehow so innocent that Evelyn's heart softened.

"Yes," she asserted, "it's dreadful." Then she asked a question. "Who's the Mr. Drayton you mentioned?"

Kitty blushed becomingly; this was her lead.

"He's a kind of partner in the lumber scheme; I'm going to marry him. He's as firm a friend of Mr. Vane's as any one. There's a reason for that — I was in a very tight place once, left without money in a desolate settlement where there was nothing I could

do, when Mr. Vane helped me. But perhaps that wouldn't interest you."

For a moment her doubts still clung to their hold in Evelyn's mind, and then she suddenly drove the last of them out, with a stinging sense of humiliation. She could not distrust this girl; it was Jessy's suggestion that was incredible.

"It would interest me very much," she declared.

Kitty told her story effectively, but with caution, laying most stress upon Vane's compassion for the child and her invalid mother. She was rather impressed by Miss Chisholm, but she supposed that she was endowed with some of the failing common to human nature.

Evelyn listened with confused emotions and a softened face. She was convinced of the truth of the simple tale, and the thought of Vane's keeping his moneyed friends and directors waiting in Vancouver in order that a tired child might rest and gather shells upon a sunny beach stirred her deeply. It was so characteristic; exactly what she would have expected him to do.

"Thank you," she said quietly, when Kitty had finished; and then, flinging off the last of her reserve, she asked a number of questions about Drayton and about Celia's affairs.

Before her visitors left, all three were on friendly terms; but Evelyn was glad when they took their departure. She wanted to be alone to think. In spite of the relief of which she was conscious, her thoughts were far from pleasant. Foremost among them figured a crushing sense of shame. She had wickedly misjudged a man who had given her many proofs of

the fineness of his character; the evil she had imputed to him was born of her own perverted imagination. She was no better than the narrow-minded, conventional Pharisees she detested, who were swift to condemn out of the uncleanness of their self-righteous hearts. Then, as she began to reason, it flashed upon her that she was, perhaps, wronging herself. Her mind had been cunningly poisoned by an utterly unscrupulous and wholly detestable woman, and she flamed out into a fit of imperious anger against Jessy. She had a hazy idea that this was not altogether reasonable, for she was to some extent fastening the blame she deserved upon another person's shoulders; but it did not detract from the comfort the indulgence in her indignation brought her.

When she had grown a little calmer, Mrs. Nairn came in; and Mrs. Nairn was a discerning lady. It was not difficult to lead Evelyn on to speak of her visitors, for the girl's pride was broken and she felt in urgent need of sympathy; but when she had described the interview she felt impelled to avoid any discussion of the more important issues, even with the kindly Scotch lady.

"I was surprised at the girls' manner," she concluded. "It must have been embarrassing to them; but they were really so delicate over it, and they had so much courage."

Mrs. Nairn smiled.

"Although one of them has traveled with third-rate strolling companies and the other has waited in a hotel? Weel, maybe your surprise was natural. Ye canna all at once get rid of the ideas and prejudices ye were brought up with."

"I suppose that was it," replied Evelyn thoughtfully.

Her companion's eyes twinkled.

"Then, if ye're to live among us happily, ye'll have to try. In the way ye use the words, some of the leading men in this country were no brought up at all."

"Do you imagine that I'm going to live here?"

Mrs. Nairn gathered up one or two articles she had brought into the room with her and moved toward the door, but before she reached it she looked back with a laugh.

"It occurred to me that the thing was no altogether impossible."

An hour afterward, Evelyn and Mrs. Nairn went down into the town, and in one of the streets they came upon Jessy leaving a store. The latter was not lacking in assurance and she moved toward them with a smile; but Evelyn gazed at her with a total disregard of her presence and walked quietly on. There was neither anger nor disdain in her attitude; to have shown either would have been a concession she could not make. The instincts of generations of gently-reared Englishwomen were aroused, as well as the revulsion of an untainted nature from something unclean.

Jessy's cheeks turned crimson and a malevolent light flashed into her eyes as she crossed the street. Mrs. Nairn noticed her expression and smiled at her companion.

"I'm thinking it's as weel ye met Jessy after she had got the boat for Carroll," she commented.

The remark was no doubt justified, but the fact

that Jessy had been able to offer valuable assistance failed to soften Evelyn toward her. It was merely another offense.

In the meanwhile, the powerful tug steamed northward, towing the sloop, which would be required, and after landing the rescue party at the inlet steamed away again. Before she had disappeared Carroll began his march, and his companions long remembered it. Two of them were accustomed to packing surveyors' stores through the seldom-trodden bush and the others had worked in logging camps and chopped new roads, but though they did not spare themselves, they lacked their leader's animus. Carroll, with all his love of ease, could rise to meet an emergency, and he wore out his companions before the journey was half done. He scarcely let them sleep; he fed them on canned stuff to save delay in lighting fires; and he grew more feverishly impatient with every mile they made. He showed it chiefly by the tight set of his lips and the tension of his face, though now and then when fallen branches or thickets barred the way he fell upon the obstacles with the ax in silent fury. For the rest, he took the lead and kept it, and the others, following with shoulders aching from the pack-straps and labored breath, suppressed their protests.

Like many another made in that country, it was a heroic journey; one in which every power of mind and body was taxed to the limit. Delay might prove fatal. The loads were heavy; fatigue seized the shrinking flesh, but the unrelenting will, trained in such adventures, mercilessly spurred it on. Toughened muscle is useful and in the trackless North can seldom be dispensed with; but man's strength does

not consist of that alone: there are occasions when the stalwart fall behind and die.

In front of them, as they progressed, lay the unchanging forest, tangled, choked with fallen wreckage, laced here and there with stabbing thorns, appalling and almost impenetrable to the stranger. They must cleave their passage, except where they could take to the creek for an easier way and wade through stingingly cold water or flounder over slippery fangs of rock and ice-encrusted stones. There was sharp frost among the ranges and the brush through which they tore their way was generally burdened with clogging snow. They went on, however, and on the last day Carroll drew some distance ahead of those who followed him. It was dark when he discovered that he had lost them, but that did not matter, for now and then faint moonlight came filtering down and he was leaving a plain trail behind. His shoulders were bleeding beneath the biting straps; he was on the verge of exhaustion; but he struggled forward, panting heavily and rending his garments to rags as he smashed through the brakes in the darkness.

The night — it seemed a very long one — was nearly over when he recognized the roar of a rapid that rang in louder and louder pulsations across the snow-sprinkled bush. He was not far from the end now, and he became conscious of an unnerving fear. The ground was ascending sharply, and when he reached the top of the slope the question from which he shrank would be answered for him — if there should be no blink of light among the serried trunks, he would have come too late.

He reached the summit and his heart leaped; then

he clutched at a drooping branch to support himself, shaken by a reaction that sprang from relief. A flicker of uncertain radiance fell upon the trees ahead, and down the bitter wind there came the reek of pungent smoke. The bush was slightly more open, and Carroll broke into a run. Presently he came crashing and stumbling into the light of the fire and then stopped, too stirred and out of breath to speak. Vane lay where the red glow fell upon his face, smiling up at him.

"Well," he said, "you've come. I've been expecting you, but on the whole I got along not so badly."

Carroll flung off his pack and sat down beside the fire; then he fumbled for his pipe and began to fill it hurriedly with trembling fingers. He lighted it and flung away the match before he spoke.

"Sorry I couldn't get through sooner," he mumbled. "The stores on board the sloop were spoiled; I had to go on to Vancouver. But there are things to eat in my pack."

"Hand it across. I haven't been faring sumptuously the last few days. No, sit still! I'm supple enough from the waist up."

He proved it by the way he leaned to and fro as he opened the pack and distributed part of its contents among the cooking utensils. Carroll assisted him now and then but he did not care to speak. The sight of the man's gaunt face and the eagerness in his eyes prompted him to an outbreak of feeling rather foreign to his nature, and he did not think his companion would appreciate it. When the meal was ready, Vane looked up at him.

"I've no doubt this journey cost you something — partner," he said.

Then they ate cheerfully, and Carroll, watching his friend's efforts with appreciation, told his story in broken sentences. Afterward, they lighted their pipes, but by and by Carroll's fell from his relaxing grasp.

"I can't get over this sleepiness," he explained. "I believe I disgraced myself in Vancouver by going off in the most unsuitable places."

"I dare say it was quite natural. Anyway, hadn't you better hitch yourself a little farther from the fire?"

Carroll did so and lay still afterward, but Vane kept watch during the rest of the night, until in the dawn the packers appeared.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### VANE IS REINSTATED

BREAKFAST was over and the two men, wrapped in blankets, lay on opposite sides of the fire, while the packers reclined in various ungainly attitudes about another. Now that they had a supply of provisions, haste was not a matter of importance, and there was no doubt that the rescue party needed a rest. Carroll was aching all over and was somewhat disturbed in mind. He had not said anything about their financial affairs to his comrade yet, and the subject must be mentioned. It was, from every point of view, an unpleasant one.

"What about the Clermont?" Vane asked at length. "You needn't trouble about breaking the news — come right to the point."

"Then, to all intents and purposes, the company has gone under; it's been taken over by Horsfield's friends. Nairn has sold our stock — at considerably less than face value," Carroll explained, adding a brief account of the absorption of the concern.

Vane's face set hard.

"I anticipated something of the kind last night; I saw how you kept clear of the matter."

"But you said nothing."

"No. I'd had time to consider the thing while I lay here, and it didn't look as if I could have got an

intelligible account out of you. But you may as well mention how much Nairn got."

He lay smoking silently for a few minutes after he learned the amount, and Carroll was strongly moved to sympathy. He felt that it was not the financial reverse but one indirect result of it which would hit his comrade hardest.

"Well," Vane said grimly, "I suppose I've done what my friends would consider a mad thing in coming up here — and I must face the reckoning."

Carroll wondered whether their conversation could be confined to the surface of the subject, because there were depths beneath it that it would be better to leave undisturbed.

"After all, you're far from broke," he encouraged him. "You have what the Clermont stock brought in, and you may make something out of this shingle scheme."

There was bitterness in Vane's laugh.

"When I left Vancouver for England I was generally supposed to be well on the way to affluence, and there was some foundation for the idea. I had floated the Clermont in the face of opposition; people believed in me; I could have raised what money I required for any new undertaking. Now a good deal of my money and all of my prestige is gone; people have very little confidence in a man who has shown himself a failure. What's more, I may be a cripple. My leg will probably have to be broken again."

Carroll could guess his companion's thoughts. There was a vein of stubborn pride in him, and he had, no doubt, decided it was unfitting that Evelyn's future should be linked to that of a ruined man. This

was an exaggerated view, because Vane was in reality far from ruined, and even if he had been so, he had in him the ability to recover from his misfortunes. Still, the man was obstinate and generally ready to make a sacrifice for an idea. Carroll, however, consoled himself with the reflection that Evelyn would probably have something to say upon the subject if she were given an opportunity, and he felt certain that Mrs. Nairn would contrive that she had one.

"I can't see any benefit in making things out considerably worse than they are," he objected.

"Nor can I," Vane agreed. "After all, I was getting pretty tired of the city, and I suppose I can raise enough to put up a small-power mill. It will be a pleasant change to take charge for a year or two in the bush. I'll make a start at the thing as soon as I'm able to walk."

This was significant, as it implied that he did not intend to remain in Vancouver, where he would be able to enjoy Evelyn's company; but Carroll made no comment, and Vane soon spoke again.

"Didn't you mention last night that it was through Miss Horsfield that you got the tug? I was thinking about something else at the time."

"Yes. She made Horsfield put some pressure on the people who had previously hired the boat."

"That's rather strange."

For a moment he looked puzzled, but almost immediately his face grew impassive, and Carroll knew that he had some idea of Jessy's treachery. He was, however, sure that any suspicions his comrade entertained would remain locked up in his breast.

"I'm grateful to her, anyway," Vane added. "I

dare say I could have held out another day or two, but it wouldn't have been pleasant."

Carroll began to talk about the preparations for their return, which he soon afterward set about making, and early the next morning they started for the sloop, carrying Vane upon a stretcher they had brought with them. Though they had to cut a passage for it every here and there, they reached the sloop in safety, and after some trouble in getting Vane below and onto a locker, Carroll decided to sail straight for Vancouver. They were favored with moderate, fair winds, and though the little vessel was uncomfortably crowded, she made a quick passage and stole in through the Narrows as dusk was closing down one tranquil evening.

Evelyn had spent the greater part of the afternoon on the forest-crested rise above the city, where she could look down upon the inlet. She had visited the spot frequently during the last few days, watching eagerly for a sail that did not appear. There had been no news of Carroll since the skipper of the tug reported having landed him, and the girl was tormented by doubts and anxieties. She had just come back and was standing in Mrs. Nairn's sitting-room, when she heard the tinkle of the telephone bell. A moment or two later her hostess entered hastily.

"It's a message from Alic," she cried. "He's heard from the wharf — Vane's sloop's crossing the harbor. I'll away down to see Carroll brings him here."

Evelyn turned to follow her, but Mrs. Nairn waved her back.

"No," she said firmly; "ye'll bide where ye are.

See they get plenty lights on — at the stairhead and in the passage — and the room on the left of it ready."

She was gone in another moment, and Evelyn hastily carried out her instructions and then waited with what patience she could assume. At last there was a rattle of wheels outside, followed by a voice giving orders, and then a tramp of feet. The sounds brought her a strange inward shrinking, but she ran to the door, and saw two tattered men awkwardly carrying a stretcher up the steps, while Carroll and another assisted them. Then the light fell upon its burden and, half prepared as she was, she started in dismay. Vane, whom she had last seen in vigorous health, lay partly covered with an old blanket which had slipped off him to the waist. His jacket looked a mass of rags, his hat had fallen aside and his face showed hollow and worn and pinched. Then he saw her and a light leaped into his eyes, but the next moment Carroll's shoulder hid him and the men plodded on toward the stairs. They ascended them with difficulty and the girl waited until Carroll came down.

"I noticed you at the door. I dare say you were a little shocked at the change in Vane," he said. "What he has undergone has pulled him down, but if you had seen him when I first found him, you'd have been worse startled. He's getting on quite satisfactorily."

Evelyn was relieved to hear it; and Carroll continued:

"As soon as the doctor comes, we'll make him more presentable; he can't be moved till then, as I'm not sure about the last bandages I put on. Afterward, he'll no doubt hold an audience."

There was nothing to do but wait, and Evelyn again summoned her patience. Before long, a doctor arrived, and Carroll followed him to Vane's room. The invalid's face was very impassive, though Carroll waited in tense suspense while the doctor stripped off the bandages and bark supports from the injured leg. He examined it attentively, and then looked around at Carroll.

"You fixed that limb, when it was broken in the bush?" he asked.

"Yes," Carroll answered, with a desperate attempt to treat the matter humorously. "But I really think we both had a hand in the thing. My partner favored me with his views; I disclaim some of the responsibility."

"Then I guess you've been remarkably fortunate. Perhaps that's the best way of expressing it."

Vane raised his head and fixed his eyes upon the speaker.

"It won't have to be rebroken? I'll be able to walk without a limp?"

"It's most probable."

Vane's eyes glistened and he let his head fall back.

"It's good news; better than I expected. Now if you could fix me up again, I'd like to get dressed. I've felt like a hobo long enough."

The doctor smiled indulgently.

"We can venture to change that state of affairs, but I'll superintend the operation."

It was some time before Vane's toilet was completed, and then Carroll surveyed him with humorous admiration.

"It strikes me you do us credit; and now I suppose I can announce that you'll receive?"

Nairn and his wife and Evelyn came in. Nairn, shaking hands with Vane very heartily, looked down at him with twinkling eyes.

"I'd have been glad to see ye, however ye had come," he asserted, and Vane fully believed him. "For a' that, this is no the way I would have wished to welcome ye."

"When a man won't take his friends' advice, what can he expect?" retorted Vane.

Nairn nodded, smiling.

"Let it be a warning. If the making of your mark and money is your object, ye must stick to it and think of nothing else. Ye canna accumulate riches by spreading yourself, and philanthropy's no lucrative, except maybe to a few."

"It's good counsel, but I'm thinking that it's a pity," Mrs. Nairn remarked. "What would ye say, Evelyn?"

The girl was aware that the tone of light banter had been adopted to cover deeper feelings, which those present shrank from expressing; but she ventured to give her thoughts free rein.

"I agree with you in one respect," she said. "But I can't believe the object mentioned is Mr. Vane's only one. He would never be willing to pay the necessary price."

It was a delicate compliment uttered in all sincerity, and Vane's worn face grew warm. He was, however, conscious that it would be safer to avoid being serious, and he smiled.

"Well," he drawled, "looking for timber rights is apt to prove expensive, too. I had a haunting fear that I might be lame, until the doctor banished it. I'd better own that I'd no great confidence in Carroll's surgery."

Carroll, keeping strictly to the line the others had chosen, made him an ironical bow; but Evelyn was not to be deterred.

"It was foolish of you to be troubled," she declared. "It isn't a fault to be wounded in an honorable fight, and even if the mark remains, there is no reason why one should be ashamed of it."

Mrs. Nairn glanced at the girl rather sharply, but Carroll came to his comrade's relief.

"Strictly speaking, there wasn't a wound," he pointed out. "Fortunately, it was what is known as a simple fracture. If it had been anything else, I'm inclined to think I couldn't have treated it."

Nairn chuckled, as if this met with his approval; and his wife turned around as they heard a patter of footsteps on the stairs.

"Yon bell has kept on ringing ever since we came up," she complained. "I left word I was no to be disturbed. Weel"— as the door opened —"what is it, Minnie?"

"The reception room's plumb full," announced the maid, who was lately from the bush. "If any more folks come along, I sure won't know where to put 'em."

Now that the door was open, Evelyn could hear a murmur of voices on the floor below, and the next moment the bell rang violently again. It struck her as a testimonial to the injured man. Vane had not spent a long time in Vancouver, but he had the gift of

making friends. Having heard of the sloop's arrival, they had come to inquire for him, and there was obviously a number of them.

Mrs. Nairn glanced interrogatively at Carroll.

"It does no look as if they could be got rid of by a message."

"I guess he's fit to see them," Carroll answered. "We'll hold a levee. If he'd only let me, I'd like to pose him a bit."

Mrs. Nairn, with Evelyn's assistance, did so instead, rearranging the cushions about the man, in spite of his confused and half-indignant protests; and during the next half-hour the room was generally full. People walked in, made sympathetic inquiries, or exchanged cheerful banter, until Mrs. Nairn forcibly dismissed the last of them. After this, she declared that Vane must go to sleep, and paying no heed to his assertion that he had not the least wish to do so, she led her remaining companions away.

A couple of hours had passed when she handed Evelyn a large tumbler containing a preparation of beaten eggs and milk.

"Ye might take him this and ask if he would like anything else," she said. "I'm weary of the stairs and I would no trust Minnie. She's handiest at spilling things."

Carroll grinned.

"It's the third and, I'd better say firmly, the limit."

Then he assumed an aggrieved expression as Evelyn moved off with the tray.

"I can't see why I couldn't have gone. I think I've discharged my duties as nurse satisfactorily."

"I canna help ye thinking," Mrs. Nairn informed

him. "But I would point out that ye have now and then been wrong."

"That's a fact," Carroll confessed.

Evelyn fully shared his suspicions. Her hostess's artifice was a transparent one, but she nevertheless fell in with it. She had seen Vane only in the company of others; this might be the same again to-morrow; and there was something to be said. By intuition as much as reason, she recognized that there was something working in his mind; something that troubled him and might trouble her. It excited her apprehension and animated her with a desire to combat it. That she might be compelled to follow an unconventional course did not matter. She knew this man was hers — and she could not let him go.

She entered his room collectedly. He was lying, neatly dressed, upon a couch with his shoulders raised against the end of it, for he had thrown the cushions which supported him upon the floor. As she came in, he leaned down in an attempt to recover them, and finding himself too late looked up guiltily. The fact that he could move with so much freedom was a comfort to the girl. She set the tray down on a table near him.

"Mrs. Nairn has sent you this," she said, and the laugh they both indulged in drew them together.

Then her mood changed and her heart yearned over him. He had gone away a strong, self-confident, prosperous man, and he had come back defeated, broken in fortune and terribly worn. Her pity shone in her softening eyes.

"Do you wish to sleep?" she asked.

"No," Vane assured her; "I'd a good deal rather talk to you."

"I want to say something," Evelyn confessed. "I'm afraid I was rather unpleasant to you the evening before you sailed. I was sorry for it afterward; it was flagrant injustice."

"Then I wonder why you didn't answer the letter I wrote at Nanaimo."

"The letter? I never received one."

Vane considered this for a few moments.

"After all," he declared, "it doesn't matter now. I'm acquitted?"

"Absolutely."

The man's satisfaction was obvious, but he smiled.

"Do you know," he said, "I've still no idea of my offense?"

Evelyn was exceedingly glad to hear it, but a warmth crept into her face, and as the blood showed through the delicate skin he fixed his eyes upon her intently.

"It was all a mistake; I'm sorry still," she murmured penitently.

"Oh!" he exclaimed in a different tone. "Don't trouble about it. The satisfaction of being acquitted outweighs everything else. Besides, I've made a number of rather serious mistakes myself. The search for that spruce, for instance, is supposed to be one."

"No," returned Evelyn decidedly; "whoever thinks that, is wrong. It is a very fine thing you have done. It doesn't matter in the least that you were unsuccessful."

"Do you really believe that?"

"Of course. How could I believe anything else?"

The man's face changed again, and once more she read the signs. Whatever doubts and half-formed resolutions — and she had some idea of them — had been working in his mind were dissipating.

"Well," he continued, "I've sacrificed the best half of my possessions and have destroyed the confidence of the people who, to serve their ends, would have helped me on. Isn't that a serious thing?"

"No; it's really a most unimportant one. I"— the slight pause gave the assertion force —"really mean it."

Vane partly raised himself with one arm and there was no doubting the significance of his intent gaze.

"I believe I made another blunder — in England. I should have had more courage and have faced the risk. But you might have turned against me then."

"I don't think that's likely," Evelyn murmured, lowering her eyes.

The man leaned forward eagerly, but the hand he stretched out fell short, and the trivial fact once more roused her compassion for his helplessness.

"You can mean only one thing!" he cried. "You wouldn't be afraid to face the future with me now?"

"I wouldn't be afraid at all."

A half-hour later Mrs. Nairn tapped at the door and smiled rather broadly when she came in. Then she shook her head reproachfully.

"Ye should have been asleep a while since," she scolded Vane, and then turned to Evelyn. "Is this the way ye intend to look after him?"

She waved the girl toward the door and when she joined her in the passage she kissed her effusively.

"Ye have got the man I would have chosen ye," she declared. "It will no be any fault of his if ye are sorry."

"I have very little fear of that," laughed Evelyn.

THE END

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